Table of Contents

1. Prologue
2. Calm before the Storm
3. Mark of the Tiger
4. Out and About
5. Omens
6. Codes
7. Fire!
8. The passing of Yellowfang
9. In the nightlight
10. New blood
11. Secrets
12. The gathering
13. A new threat
14. Battle for Sunningrocks
15. Revelations
16. Spottedleaf's secret
17. Bad moon rising
18. Get out alive
19. Rising star
20. New life
21. The arrivals
22. Rescue mission
23. The trial of Darkstripe
24. Gathering darkness
25. The shattering of peace
26. Negotiations
27. Moonlit meander
28. The Storm breaks
29. Hold the line
30. The Eternal dark
31. Duel of Fates
32. Aftermath

Prologue

The rain pelting down from the heavens only added to the sense of sadness that hung heavily over ThunderClan camp. Even within the leader's den, the atmosphere seemed filled with sorrow, as the two cats within spoke to each other.
"You must find Yellowfang and bring her back here. Do you understand Firepaw?" asked Bluestar, "We cannot let Spottedleaf's death go without punishment." The young, flame furred apprentice bowed his head in recognition of his leader's command.
"Yes Bluestar," he mewed sadly, "But if I may, I would like to pay my final respects to Spottedleaf and share tongues with her one last time."
Bluestar looked at her apprentice. She had never seen Firepaw so melancholy. No matter how many times the other clan cats had teased and jeered at him calling him "kittypet", no matter how many times he had found it hard adapting to clan life from his house cat origins, Firepaw had always managed to shake it off and surprise everyone time and again. But now, all of that happiness, all that will to fight and go on, seemed so distant that Bluestar worriedly began to wonder if the young tom would ever recover.
"Very well," she said at length, "But do not spend too long, I need you to track down Yellowfang if we are going to have any chance of learning the details of Spottedleaf's death."
"Thank you Bluestar," nodded Firepaw turning on his paws and padding slowly out of her den. The rain soaked him to the fur. It was as though StarClan itself shared his grief. His heart filled with sadness as he looked upon the prone, tortoiseshell body of Spottedleaf. Failing to fight back the tears welling up in his emerald eyes, Firepaw buried his muzzle into the medicine cat's fur, breathing in her sweet scent and grooming her one last time.
"Goodbye my sweet Spottedleaf," he mewed sadly. He blinked away a tear and then turned to walk away. Then he stopped, as he glanced back at her body. He blinked in surprise and shook his head violently. Surely his grief was making him delirious and causing him to see things. He looked again just to be sure of himself. No, he wasn't seeing things. Spottedleaf's flank was moving up and down

so minutely that it was almost completely impossible to notice. Firepaw felt his heart skip a beat.
Spottedleaf was still alive!
Rushing immediately to Spottedleaf's den, Firepaw began to search for something that might save his friend.
"Think," thought Firepaw frantically, "What did Spottedleaf use to stop bleeding?"
Suddenly, something caught Firepaws eye. It was a silvery thread, glistening as a rain droplet ran down along it. Firepaw's eyes sparkled with glee as he saw the cobweb,. Just what he had been looking for! Quickly, he grabbed a web and rushed back out to Spottedleaf. Delicately he began to wrap the cobweb around Spottedleaf's neck wound. He could feel her incredibly shallow breath on his paws as he crudely applied the bandage. Firepaw was so engrossed with his work that he did not notice three cats pad up behind him.
"Firepaw, I think you have spent enough time grieving over Spottedleaf," said Bluestar, "I need you to track down Yellowfang."
"But she's not dead," protested Firepaw, "We can still save Spottedleaf!"
"Hah," snorted Tigerclaw, "I should have know something like this would happen. This soft kittypet cannot deal with the fact that our medicine cat has been slain."
Firepaw's fur bristled as the tabby simply dismissed Spottedleaf as "medicine cat." "But..."
"Firepaw I know this is upsetting," interceded Bluestar with a calm voice,"But you have to let her go."
Firepaw was about to explain when Greypaw spoke up. "Wait Bluestar, look closely at her flanks." Bluestar and Tigerclaw did so and their eyes widened in both surprise and relief when they finally noticed the subtle movements of Spottedleaf's breathing. By now several other cats had gathered to see what was going on concerning the supposedly "dead" she cat.
"Firepaw," said Bluestar with her calm but undeniable authority, "Take Greypaw and track down Yellowfang before the rains washes away her scent."
"But what about..." asked Firepaw.
"We will take care of her, now go." ordered Bluestar. As Firepaw and Greypaw padded off, Bluestar turned to the gathered cats. "Quickly, get her inside the medicine den!"

Daintily, like the way a queen carries her kit, the cats carried Spottedleaf to her den. Once they had set her down, many cats watched her anxiously, unsure of what to do while others suggested possible herbs to help her but not being medicine cats, these were mainly useless.
Slowly, Spottedleaf opened her eyes. Quickly she made an attempt to stand, her eyes filled with shock before she fell painfully to the ground.
"Careful," said Bluestar, "We don't want you opening your wound any more."
"Where is Clawface?" asked Spottedleaf.
"Clawface?" asked Bluestar, "Is that who attacked you? Not Yellowfang?"
"Yes," said Spottedleaf, "Yellowfang had nothing to do with it."
Bluestar turned to Whitestorm. "We have made a mistake. Take Longtail and Darkstripe and go after Firepaw and Greypaw and tell them that Brokenstar, not Yellowfang, has the stolen kits."
"Yes Bluestar," nodded Whitestorm respectfully and dashing off with Longtail and Darkstripe to pursue Firepaw and Greypaw.
"For a moment I was afraid that I would be joining StarClan," sighed Spottedleaf, "Thank you for saving me."
"Oh we had nothing to do with it. We had given you up for dead," admitted Bluestar, "It was actually Firepaw who saved you when he noticed that you were still breathing. Now get some rest."
"Firepaw saved me?" mummered Spottedleaf and she lay down her head. She remembered faintly feeling his presence while she was out cold. "Yes. Of course it was him. Who else?"Spottedleaf smiled as she pictured the ginger tom before falling into a light and peaceful sleep.

Calm before the Storm

A light, calming breeze blew through the ThunderClan camp, ruffling Fireheart's bright orange fur as he stood watching the cats he had been tasked to protect. He sighed loudly to himself, he couldn't have been made deputy at a worse time. Relations with ShadowClan were as bad as ever but with the betrayal of Tigerclaw, the clan had a new and very dangerous threat to face. The fact that some cats in the clan may still support the ex deputy was neither here nor there but Fireheart had his still had some doubts about Darkstripe and Longtail. Perhaps worst of all was the secret that Fireheart was keeping from the rest of ThunderClan.
Their leader Bluestar was on her ninth and final life.
"Is everything okay Fireheart?" came a soft female voice from behind him. Turning around, Fireheart found himself staring into Spottedleaf's kind eyes. Fireheart found himself peering deep into the amber pools before quickly looked away before it could become too awkward for either of them.
"Yeah," he lied looking down at his paws. He didn't want to bother Spottedleaf with his problems. That was when he looked up and found that Spottedleaf was sitting right next to him, a look of concern evident on her face.
"Fireheart, I know something is wrong," she said understandingly, "Please tell me what is wrong, please don't shut me out."
Fireheart sighed as he noticed the scar on Spottedleaf's neck, a potent reminder of the day that he almost lost her. It still gave him nightmares. Sighing once more, he lowered his head.
"It isn't easy being deputy," he admitted, "I miss Greystripe."
Spottedleaf looked into Fireheart's eyes, she knew that he missed his old friend Greystripe ever since he had run off to join RiverClan so that he could be with his kits after their mother Silverstream, a RiverClan warrior, had died giving birth. And now, Fireheart needed his friend more than ever. Spottedleaf nuzzled him slightly.
"We all miss him," she comforted,"But if you ever need someone to talk to Fireheart, know that I am always here for you."
Fireheart smiled at this. Ever since he had arrived in ThunderClan as a kittypet, Spottedleaf had shown him nothing but kindness to

him. He felt warm whenever she was around and deep down, he felt something much more powerful towards her. Spottedleaf was beautiful,caring and kind.But he lived by the warrior code and she was a medicine cat. The clan would never approve. Besides, what would she see in him with so many other potential and more importantly "clan born" toms around even if she were available.
"Thank you Spottedleaf," mewed Fireheart, "You are a true friend."
Spottedleaf smiled before looking back at her den. "So sorry Fireheart," she said, "But I must fetch some mouse bile for Smallear's ticks."
"No by all means, I understand," replied Fireheart. He watched for a while as Spottedleaf padded back to her den and started preparing the mouse bile. Then he turned his attention back to the clan and sighed.
But this time, it was for a different reason.

Mark of the Tiger

The patrol didn't stand a chance. One mintue, Whitestorm was leading Sandstorm, Longtail and Runningwind through the territory. The next they were fighting visciously against Tigerclaw's rouges. Sandstorm clawed visciously at a fierce black tom but was soon attacked by a second. Responding with the speed of a lightning bolt, Whitestorm pounced on one of the rouges, clawing and biting at his pelt. Whimpering, the rouge kicked itself free and fled into the bushes.
Roaring a challenge, Tigerclaw charged towards the ThunderClan warriors. He was not wanting for long as with a snarl, Runningwind lunged at the tabby traitor. Hissing, Runningwind made attempted to sink his fangs into Tigerclaw's neck. But at the last moment, the large tabby swiftly evaded he attack. Before Runningwind could recover from his failed attack, Tigerclaw pounced on him, his unusually long claws sinking deep into the warriors soft flesh. Runningwind claw weakly at him but Tigerclaw sank his fangs into his throat. Runnigwind was dead, a pool of red spreading around him.
Seeing this and knowing that they were outnumbered, Whitestorm yowled a retreat. Reluctantly, upon hearing this, Sandstorm and Longtail began to back away from the rouges. They paused only for Whitestorm to recover Runnigwind's body before powering back to camp. Tigerclaw's rouges briefly give chase before halting in their tracks at the rapidly growing scent of ThunderClan. With a last glance of their fleeing foes and a hissed order from Tigerclaw, the rouges slinked back into the shadows of the deep undergrowth.
Upon hearing the pained yowls of the retreating patrol, Bluestar, Fireheart and Spottedleaf raced to the camp entrance. The sight that crawled to meet them was shocking to behold. Whitestorm's patrol had returned bloodied and battle worn. Dangling limp from Whitestorm's mouth, Runningwind's body was still dripping blood all over the ground.
"Whitestorm, what happened?" demanded Bluestar.
"We were ambushed by Tigerclaw," spat the large white tom,"We were outnumbered and didn't stand a chance."

"Its time someone put an end to that monster," growled Fireheart.
"He is long gone Fireheart," meowed Sandstorm. "This was a hit and run attack. How dishonourable," she spat.
Even as they spoke, the rest of Thunderclan began to gather around the limp body of Runningwind. Respectfully they began to groom his body as they shared tongues with their fallen clan mate one last time. After she had paid her respects, Bluestar turned to Spottedleaf.
"Can you heal the patrols wounds?" she asked the tortoiseshell medicine cat.
"Not yet," Spottedleaf replied shaking her head. "I need to go out and collect more marigolds and cobwebs first."
"I do not think it would be wise to go out alone considering what just happened to the patrol," muses Bluestar.
"I will accompany her," Fireheart said in an instant. He had said it so quickly that he had suprised himself, yet alone Spottedleaf. Bluestar on the other hand simply nodded.
"Very well Fireheart," she meowed, "Escort Spottedleaf while she collects her herbs. But," Her tone turned to one of calm but undeniable authority, "Under no circumstances are you to engage any rouges. Do I make myself clear?"
"Yes Bluestar," nodded Fireheart. He turned to Spottedleaf. "Ready to go."
"S sure," nodded Spottedleaf. Fireheart looked at her for a moment. Had he detected a stutter in her speech? He shrugged the thought off.
"Lets go," he mewed. Spottedleaf nodded and soon they had left the camp.

Out and About

Padding through the forest, Spottedleaf led Fireheart to where she usually collected marigolds. From the exterior she tried to remain calm, but Spottedleaf's heart was racing, going from a gentle beat to threatening to burst out of her chest in excitement. She was alone with Fireheart. She had secretly waited for a moment like this for ages. No clan mates to interupt them. It was just them.
Soon the scent of the marigolds was thick in the air and it didn't take long for Spottedleaf to spot them. Delicately she began to pick the flowers, while her flamed pelted escort kept an eye out for danger. Fireheart's gaze swept across the surrounding forest, forever alert for any trace of the rouges. He sniffed the air warily. All clear. For now at least.
Slowly, Fireheart found his gaze drawn towards something much more alluring than the sounds and sites of the forest during Greenleaf. He watched as Spottedleaf as daintily began to pick her way through the patch of herbs with a sort of angelic grace. Her pelt seemed to radiate an aura of both beauty and tranquility. Her eyes were like burning pools of amber. Suddenly Spottedleaf glanced in his direction and Fireheart nervously averted his gaze. As she turned, Spottedleaf caught Fireheart briefly glancing in her direction. Had he been checking her out?
"Dont be silly," she told herself. "He was probably just trying to see what she was doing . Besides toms didn't fall for quiet she cats like her. They preferred feisty, pretty she cats like Sandstorm not cats like....her."
Having finished collecting the marigolds, Spottedleaf turned to Fireheart. Nervously she inadvertently looked away from him, trying not to gaze into his sparkling emerald eyes.
"Spottedleaf, is everything alright"
"What....oh yes. I am just thinking of where it would be best to collect the cobwebs." she lied. Fireheart seemed satisfied with this.
"Lets go then." he said. Spottedleaf nodded as she picked up the flowers and began to pad on. Fireheart quickly followed her and soon they were side by side.
"Where exactly are these cobwebs." he asked her after they had

been walking for a little while.
"Not far." Spottedleaf assured.
"But how farrmmph..." mumbled Fireheart as he stumbled directly into a particulary large cobweb that stretched across his path.
Spottedleaf couldn't help but giggle. Darting around, Fireheart feebly pawed at the cobweb that clung so stubbornly to his face.
"Stand still," Spottedleaf giggled, "Let me get it off." If Fireheart heard these words, he gave no indication as he continued to scramble around. The next thing that Spottedleaf remembered was a ginger blur heading directly towards her before she and Fireheart were tossed across the clearing as he collided with her. They eventually came to a halt and Spottedleaf felt a great weight on top her as she lay on her back. Slowly the medicine cat opened her eyes. She expected to see the lush green treetops.
Not Fireheart's deep green eyes.
Blushing, the fire furred tom slowly got up and off of Spottedleaf before helping her up.
"Sssorry." he stuttered as Spottedleaf found her feet again. *"Nice going mouse brain," he thought,"A perfect moment alone with the she cat of your dreams and you utterly ruin it by freaking out over a flipping cobweb."*
"Don't worry about it," mewed Spottedleaf. She carefully took the cobweb off his face and smiled. "Accidents happen."
Fireheart nodded sheepishly and aided Spottedleaf as she collected the remaining cobwebs. Finally, they had collected enough of the things and they were ready to turn back to ThunderClan camp.
"Please, allow me," meowed Fireheart picking up the cobwebs in his jaws.
"My, my what a gentletom," purred Spottedleaf. *"And a handsome one."* she thought to herself. Turning around, the two cats turned and padded away back to the relative safety of the camp.

Omens

Slowly opening his eyes, Fireheart found himself alone in the forest. Heaving himself to his haunches, Fireheart studied the darkened forest and padded around. Nothing stirred. Only Fireheart's slow breaths filled the air, seeming alarmingly loud in the silence. An owl flew over head and Fireheart dropped, ready to fight it off should the bird attempt to swoop down. But to his relief, the owl took no notice and flew off.
Then suddenly, shattering the silence, came the distressed mewing of a young kit. Fearing that the owl may be hunting the kit, Fireheart powered towards the source of the mewing. A sound of splashing and a cold wet feeling alerted Fireheart that he had mindlessly followed the sound to the river. The mewing came again from the other side, more distressed than ever.
Then another sound came from the other side of the bank, one that tugged at Fireheart's heart. Spottedleaf was screaming in fear. Diving recklessly into the frigid cold water, Fireheart paddled weakly across the swirling waters. However the waters hid many dangerous undercurrents and Fireheart was swept downstream. As he battled the currents, the frightened mews of Spottedleaf and the mystery kit tolled heavily in his ears. But resistance against such a force of nature was futile. Water filled the tom's mouth and nose and he was dragged under. The last thing he saw was a scarred tabby looking down on him, amber eyes glittering with malice and contempt.
Scrabbling out of his nest, Fireheart awoke with a start. Panting heavily, Fireheart tried shake his head clear but it was a pointless gesture. Dustpelt and Sandstorm were awakened by his sudden motion.
"Awww did our fearless deputy have an ickle nightmare?" jeered Dustpelt. Sandstorm shot the tom a glare which dared Dustpelt to make another crack at his deputy. Dustpelt toook the hint and shut up. Fireheart nodded his thanks to Sandstorm.
"I need some air," he meowed weakly before quietly leaving the den and padding out into the darkened camp. Like a queen curling around her newborn kits, night blanketed the sky above

ThunderClan, engulfing the camp in tranquility. However Firehearts thoughts were a whirlwind of questions.
"What had Tigerclaw been doing in his dreams?" he thought, "Had this been a sign from StarClan? If so what did it mean? Who was this mystery kit? And why had it and Spottedleaf been in such terror?"
Instinctively Fireheart found himself approaching the medicine den. Inside he could hear the soft and gentle breathing of the medicine cats. Peering through the brambles and branches that guarded the den, Fireheart sighed happily as he set eyes upon Spottedleaf. His relief was short lived however as Yellowfang's eyes flickered open.
"Fireheart," she almost growled, "What are you doing at this StarClan forsaken hour?"
"I..I couldnt sleep," Fireheart admitted weakly. Yellowfang rolled her eyes.
"I can see that. I meant what are you doing here?"
Fireheart felt a shiver run down his spine. Should he tell Yellowfang? "I uh... had a bad dream."
"How awful," she meowed sarcastically, "I am currently having one about a certain tom who wont let me go to sleep"
"Sorry Yellowfang."
"You should be," Yellowfang yawned. She then looked into Fireheart's eyes. The tom shifted uncomfortably. Something passed over the old medicine cat's face. Realization.
"Was StarClan's message bad?" she asked suddenly. Fireheart seemed startled at first but solemnly nodded.
"I heard a frightened kit mewing, Tigerclaw looking down on my evilly and I heard Spottedleaf screaming. What does it mean?" he half asked Yellowfang, half asked himself. Yellowfang slowly shook her head.
"I dont know right now young Fireheart, but I dont believe it to be good. Would you like some poppy seeds?" Fireheart nodded.
As Yellowfang turned to retrieve the seeds, Fireheart found his gaze being drawn towards Spottedleaf, curled up in her sleep. He couldnt help but sigh happily. She seemed so peaceful, so beautiful, like a newborn kit who is innocent to the evil of the world. But Fireheart was then interrupted by the return of Yellowfang.
"Eat these," she meowed tiredly. The fiery tom obeyed the order and then looked back at Yellowfang.
"Um Yellowfang..?"

"What is it now?" she hissed tiredly.
"Do you think I could sleep here tonight? I think that it may help."
Yellowfang briefly shot Fireheart a glare that seemed to say, "Dont push it," but then she blinked it away and simply shrugged, making room before curling back up and returning to sleep. The fact that Yellowfang had accepted told Fireheart one thing. That he must have looked absolutely terrified.
Silently, Fireheart crept into the den and curled up in the space that Yellowfang had made. Right next to Spottedleaf. Fireheart felt his pelt growing hot as he lay down next to the lovely tortoiseshell she cat and close his eyes. Her sweet scent filled his nostrils as Fireheart drifted off to sleep.
Meanwhile, two cold golden eyes watched ThunderClan camp. The dark brown tabby sneered with vindictiveness.
"How interesting," he growled softly before disappearing into the night.

Codes

Piercing the thick brambles that formed the roof of the medicine den, a single beam of sunlight fell upon the sleeping cats. Yawning, Spottedleaf rolled in her nest until she found another cat's soft fur to rest against. For a while, she lay there happily until she realised that this cat which she was leaning against smelled neither like Yellowfang nor Cinderpelt . Groggily Spottedleaf opened her eyes and she found herself nuzzling Fireheart's ginger fur. Yelping in suprise, Spottedleaf shot up, immediately waking up Fireheart, Yellowfang and Cinderpelt.
"Whats wrong?" asked Cinderpelt before seeing Fireheart. "Why are you here?"
Fireheart looked down at his paws, suddenly finding the ground very interesting as he searched his mind desperately for an answer. However he needn't have bothered.
"He came here last night complaining about bad dreams keeping him awake," mewed Yellowfang, "I gave him some poppy seeds and told him that if it helped, Fireheart could sleep in the medicine den."
Spottedleaf looked at Fireheart. "Is this true"
Fireheart paused then nodded sheepishly .
"Awww poor thing," mewed Cinderpelt.
"Do you want to talk about it" asked Spottedleaf, kindness glowing in her gentle eyes. Fireheart shook his head and stretched.
"No," he said, "I need to organise the patrols and then take Cloudpaw training."
"I understand," smiled Spottedleaf, "Being deputy is hard work. Made even harder by Bluestar's...condition."
"Ssshh," hissed Yellowfang.
Fireheart smiled and shook his head again, this time at Yellowfang.
"We are all worried about Bluestar. She hasnt been the same since Tigerclaw betrayed us. She should be back to her old self soon, but until then I will do my best to help run the clan."
"I know you will," purred Spottedleaf. She licked his cheek, "Just dont wear yourself down. I...we need you more than ever."
"I won't," nodded Fireheart. He nodded his thanks to Yellowfang

before turning and padding out of the medicine den. Spottedleaf sighed as she watched him leave before turning to the collection herbs. Expertly, Spottedleaf began to prepare some mouse bile for Smallears ticks.
"Well," remarked Cinderpelt, "I bet you enjoyed that."
"Pardon," asked Spottedleaf.
"Fireheart sleeping right next to you," Cinderpelt said playfully. "I bet you found it quite...arousing."
"I don't know what you're talking about," replied Spottedleaf innocently.
"Oh please," smirked Cinderpelt, "I've seen the way you look at him."
Spottedleaf blushed and vivid shade of crimson. Cinderpelt giggled at this. "Knew it."
Before Spottedleaf could answer, Yellowfang hissed, "Don't be absurd Cinderpelt, you know as I do that StarClan forbids medicine cats from having mates. The needs of the Clans health are above all other of our priorities."
"Well I think its wrong," retorted Cinderpelt.
"No Cinderpelt, Yellowfang is right," mewed Spottedleaf sadly, "It could never be." Sighing, Spottedleaf turned back to preparing the mouse bile while Cinderpelt and Yellowfang watched her, filled with empathy.
"Keep yourself downwind," Fireheart reminded Cloudpaw, "Otherwise your prey may scent you before you can get close enough to pounce."
"No worries," replied Cloudpaw, "No prey will escape me." Fireheart rolled his eyes at this remark. His nephew was talented no doubt, but he needed a lesson in humility.
"Don't push your luck," retorted Fireheart, "It only takes one whiff of your scent and your prey will scarper before you can catch it."
"That won't happen," smirked Cloudpaw, "I am the best hunter out of the apprentices. Even better than Brightpaw."
"I swear," muttered Fireheart, "If I ever have kits, I will have to ensure that I teach them to respect the warrior code and listen to their mentors."
"Oh so you're planning on having kits," smirked Cloudpaw.
"I never said..."
"Who's going to be your mate," interupted Cloudpaw, "Wait dont tell me. That pretty tortoiseshell Spottedleaf."

Fireheart blushed as he pictured it. *"Imagine me and Spottedleaf having kits,"* He then shook his head of the thought and scolded himself for thinking of such a thing.
"That could never happen Cloudpaw," he sighed, "The codes clearly state that medicine cats cannot have mates."
"That's not fair," complained Cloudpaw, "If it were up to me, cats could do whatever they liked."
"But it's not up to you," sighed Fireheart, "And we must respect the warrior code. Now go and get some rest." Cloudpaw nodded and trotted off to see Brightpaw and the other apprentices. Sighing, Fireheart picked himself a pigeon from the freshkill pile and went to sit by the nettle patch to eat it alone.
As he chewed, Fireheart found his gaze being drawn back to Spottedleaf. He happily watched her as she sorted herbs but sighed as he realized that his code prevented him from loving her. He would give anything to be with her. Little did Fireheart know, but Spottedleaf felt exactly the same way."

Fire!

Fireheart found himself in the forest in the late hours of the night. Suddenly he heard the sounds of frightened twoleg kits briefly before some rushed past, mewing worriedly in their strange language. Then the forest started to glow orange like leaffall leaves and everything started to get unbearably hot. A cat yowled in pain and Fireheart's heart sank as he recognised Spottedleaf's voice. Rushing towards the source of the sound, Fireheart tried to find the tortoiseshell medince cat but a cloud of thick, black smoke blinded him, making it useless for him to use either his sense of smell or sight. Mewing desparately, he searched for her. But to no avail.
Slowly Fireheart opened his eyes, a strange smell filling his nostrils. Then he heard a crackling sound followed by an intense flare of heat. Scrambling to his paws, Fireheart stood aghast as he saw the bright orange flames tearing through ThunderClan camp, consuming all in their path. A thick black smoke drifted over the encampment, filling Firehearts nostrils with its acrid stench.
"ThunderClan flee!" Fireheart yelled as he ran around the camp, waking sleeping cats, "Fire! Fire!"
Instantly, the warriors heard his cries and shot up, mewing scared as they watched the flames tear apart their camp.
"What shall we do?" panicked Sandstorm.
"Bluestar will know," said Longtail desperately. Fireheart shook his head, Bluestar was in no state to lead the clan to safety. As much as it pained him to have to do this, Fireheart knew he would have to take control.
"Everyone run to the sunningrocks. We will be safe by the river,"
"What about RiverClan?" mewed Cloudpaw.
"We will worry about them later. Now let's go." meowed Fireheart.
He turned towards Bluestars den and sighed with relief as he saw Whitestorm helping the blue grey she cat out of his den. Fireheart nodded his thanks to the senior warrior. He watched Cinderpelt go limp by.
"Cinderpelt," he mewed worried, "Where is Spottedleaf....and Yellowfang?" he added almost as an afterthought.
"They went back to help Patchpelt and Halftail," she mewed, "They

said that they would catch us up later."
"Very well," he nodded, but worry flashing in his eyes, "Everyone, we need to get to the river." Fireheart looked around at the gathered cats, many were choking and coughing due to the thick smoke. "Move! Move! Move!"
Instantly reacting to the orders of their deputy, the cats of ThunderClan scrambled up the ravine and out of camp. Fireheart sighed in relief at the relative ease which the cats evacuated. Although a few of the apprentices and elders had to stop to cough and splutter out the smoke, the ThunderClan cats were making good time. Soon the river came into view.
"Is everyone here?" asked Fireheart nervously looking around at the assembled cats.
"My kit?" screeched Goldenflower, "Where is Bramblekit?!"
"Spottedleaf and Yellowfang haven't appeared with Halftail and Patchpelt either."
"Mouse dung," muttered Fireheart before looking at Whitestorm, "I want you to stay here and guard the clan."
"Of course Fireheart," mewed Whitestorm, "But where are you going?"
"Back for the others," answered Fireheart before rushing off back to camp. Thousands of questions filled Fireheart's mind but he pushed them aside. He had to focus if he was going to save them. If he was going to save her.
Soon he could see the camp up ahead. The bright orange flames tore through the camp, reducing the brambles and ferns to naught but ashes. Terror struck Fireheart's heart. All cats feared fire.
"Help! Is anyone out there?" spluttered Spottedleaf. "Anyone ?Help!"
"I'm here Spottedleaf," called Fireheart, forgetting his fears and leaping into the camp. Spottedleaf and Yellowfang were struggling to get the two elders to move as Patchpelt and Halftail spluttered and gagged violently due to the fumes. Fireheart rushed over.
"Are you guys alright?"
"No, they won't last much longer," mewed Spottedleaf worriedly before coughing weakly. The smoke was taking a heavy toll on all of them.
"The stupid things wont budge," growled Yellowfang, "They're too scared."
Fireheart padded over to Patchpelt. "Patchpelt, can you here me? We need to get out of here now!" If the elder heard Fireheart, he

gave no sign. Patchpelt merely coughed, wide eyed in fear.
Sighing Fireheart grabbed Patchpelt's scruff and began to drag the elder towards the exit. "Spottedleaf, help me out please?"
"Of course," she mewed starting to push Patchpelts rear. Between the two of them, Fireheart and Spottedleaf started to get the petrified elder to start moving towards the exit.
"Yellowfang," coughed Fireheart, "Try and get Halftail moving. I will come back to help you once I have ensured that Spottedleaf and Patchpelt are safe."
"Just go," urged Yellowfang, struggling to get Halftail to budge.
Nodding, Fireheart dragged Pacthpelt out of camp with the aid of Spottedleaf. It was difficult and tiring but they somehow managed to get the elder up and out of the ravine. Panting Fireheart looked at Spottedleaf.
"Will he be alright?" he motioned towards Patchpelt who was now lying on the floor, barely breathing.
"I dont know," she mewed sadly, "He inhaled a lot of smoke. All we can do is get him the herbs that Cinderpelt has." She coughed slightly.
"What about you?" asked Fireheart worriedly, "Will you be alright?"
She noddded weakly, "Just get to Yellowfang, I will get Patchpelt to the others." Fireheart wished he didnt have to leave her but nodded.
"Good luck," he said giving her a quick lick on the cheek before turning and running down the ravine.
But as he did, Fireheart heard the distressed wail of a kit. Turning his head, Fireheart gasped as he saw Bramblekit clinging onto a branch over looking the fire. Fireheart inwardly groaned. Yellowfang would have to wait.
"Yellowfang," he called,"Wait a little longer, Bramblekit's in trouble."
"Just hurry.... Fireheart!" urged the old medicine cat coughing, "I cant...hold much...longer."
Fireheart nodded and rushed up the ravine, leaping onto the branch. Slowly and carefully, so as no to upset the delicate balance of the branch, he crept towards Bramblekit. The young kit mewed in terror. Gently Fireheart reached down and grasped the kit by the scruff and lifted him up. Taking great care, Fireheart carried the kit off the branch.
Suddenly Fireheart heard a crash. Shocked, he turned to see that a log had fallen, blocking the camp entrance. Worst of all, Yellowfang

and Halftail were still trapped inside. Fireheart yowled in despair as both he and Yellowfang realised that there was nothing he could do.
Scrambling up the ravine, Fireheart began to wonder. Could he have saved both Bramblekit and Yellowfang if he had helped her first? Or had he just sacrificed the noble medicine cat for the son of Tigerclaw? These questions were still whirring about his head as he padded over to the rest of ThunderClan.
"My kit!" shrieked Goldenflower rushing over to Fireheart and taking Bramblekit off him, "Thank you Fireheart! Thank you."
Fireheart was about to answer when Cinderpelt padded over.
"Where is Yellowfang?" she asked
Fireheart looked down in shame, "There wasnt time for me to save her and Bramblekit."
For a moment Cinderpelt looked distraught.
"How are Spottedleaf and Patchpelt?" asked Fireheart hoping to take her mind off it but really wanting to know about how Spottedleaf was doing.
"Spottedleaf's fine," she mewed quietly, "But there was nothing we could do for Patchpelt." Cinderpelt pointed to where the elders gathered around the body of their fallen friend. Fireheart shared their grief but knew this was not the time or place.
"ThunderClan," he meowed, "The wind is blowing the flames this way. We have no choice but to cross the river to safety."
"Are you mad?" yowled Dakstripe, "If a RiverClan patrol finds us, we are finished."
"Do as he says," ordered Whitestorm getting Bluestar ready for the crossing. Fireheart nodded his thanks to the senior warrior and showed the cats the point where the river was shallowest. "We should cross here."
Whitestorm led Bluestar in, paddling across. Dustpelt followed shortly with Fernpaw and Sandstorm. Cinderpelt struggled to cross while keeping her medicine herbs dry but was somehow managing However Smallear refused to go in despite Spottedleafs efforts to convince him otherwise.
"I...I cant..."
"But Smallear you must," she urged kindly but with an undeniable urgency.
"I ...cant..."
"Sorry Smallear," mewed Fireheart, "But we dont have time for this.

"Before Smallear realised what was happening, Fireheart pushed him into the water and began helping him to cross. Fireheart silently cursed, Smallear was heavier than he looked. Suddenly he felt his load get lighter and knew that some other cat was helping him. He smiled even more when he looked up and saw that it was Spottedleaf. A warm energy filled his body when he looked into her burning amber eyes and he started to paddle across with a will. But even so, it was tiring and Fireheart noticed any cats struggling. Dreadful realisation struck him.
They may not make it.
Suddenly he heard a yowl. Looking across the river, Fireheart saw Leopardfur and Stonefur, two RiverClan warriors on the other side of the river. Just what he needed, trouble with RiverClan. But then the RiverClan cats leapt into the river and swam around the ThunderClan cats, aiding them cross. Fireheart caught sight of his old friend Greystripe and knew instantly what was going on. Sighing with relief, Fireheart focused on the other shore as he and Spottedleaf paddled to the other side.

The passing of Yellowfang

Warily the ThunderClan cats looked around the RiverClan camp. Their hosts watched the ThunderClan cats in the same way a hunter regards a weakened prey animal. Fireheart felt his fur prickle as Crookedstar apporached and made sure he kept his eyes on Bluestar and Spottedleaf.
"We saw the smoke from here," said Crookedstar, "We were well aware that your warriors would head towards the river and so RiverClan made preparations. You have you own section within our camp and your own freshkill pile. RiverClan will look after its guests."
"Thank you Crookedstar," mewed Bluestar, "ThunderClan will never forget the noble deeds of RiverClan's charity."
As his leader spoke these words, Fireheart felt his fur prickle and he felt his attention being brought to the RiverClan deputy, Leopardfur. No doubt she would find a way to use this debt to her advantage when she became leader. Even though Crookedstar said that the ThunderClan warriors were guests, Fireheart couldnt help but wonder if they were really prisoners.
"Hey Fireheart," came a familar voice and the ginger tom smiled.
"Hey Greystripe," he smiled, "How are the kits?"
"Good," he smiled, "The she cat is as beautiful as their mother. I wish Silverstream could have been around to see them." The light in his eyes faded slightly.
"She would have been proud," said Spottedleaf approaching.
Fireheart nodded.
"You have looked after them well," he agreed. Greystripe nodded sadly.
"Whats wrong with Cinderpelt?" asked Greystripe, "I noticed that she was looking glum, not touching her freshkill.
Now it was Fireheart's turn to look melancholy. "Yellowfang never made it out of camp." Greystripe nodded solemnly.
"We should go back for her," he said.
"I will make the arrangements with Bluestar," meowed Fireheart.
"Fireheart," mewed Greystripe, "I would like to come. Yellowfang was my friend too."

"Of course," meowed Fireheart and went off to find Bluestar. She was curled up by some rushes, eyes closed. Whitestorm was sat by her side, forever loyal. He dipped his head in greeting to Fireheart.
"Quiet Fireheart," he whispered, "Bluestars resting."
Fireheart nodded and mewed quietly, "When she awakens, please tell her that Greystripe and I are going to see if we can find Yellowfang."
Whitestorm simply nodded and said quietly. "Good luck."
Fireheart dipped his head in thanks and went to the edge of RiverClan camp where Greystripe and Spottedleaf were waiting.
"What are you doing here Spottedleaf?" asked Fireheart not unkindly, just suprised.
"I'm coming too," she said, "You will need a medicine cat if you do find Yellowfang." To this Fireheart could find no argument and so agreed.
Before long, the trio of friends were over the river and padding through the charred remains of the forest. The ground was still warm under paw and the landscape was horrendously. Skeletal branches once covered in bright green leaves jutted out at different angles as though the tees were silently begging the cats to end their misery. Fireheart bit back the tears as they approached the remains of ThunderClan camp.
The smell of smoke was still heavy in the air and as the cats crawled through the scorched brambles that had made up the entrance of the camp, thorns scratched at their pelts. Gasping in shock as they entered the camp, the trio recoiled in horror at what they saw.
All of the dens had been reduced to cinders and ashes, the dense foliage that had once covered the medicine cat den had been burnt compleltely den. But perhaps the most horrible of all was the charred body of Halftail in the centre of the camp. Most of his fur had been scorched off and his body was blackened and scarred. Fireheart dipped his head in sorrow for the clans loss.
"Where is Yellowfang?" asked Greystripe. The body of the medicine cat was nowhere to be seen. Fireheart felt his spirit lift. Perhaps Yellowfang had found safety and had survived the flames.
"Spread out," he told Spottedleaf and Greystripe, "We must find Yellowfang." His friends nodded and left to search the camp.
Fireheart searched the remains of the nursery and was about to search the highrock when Spottedleaf called his name. Rushing over

to the medicine den, Fireheart saw Spottedleaf was sat next to a pathetic figure of a cat, panting on the scorched earth.
Yellowfang.
"Fireheart....Spottedleaf..." coughed Yellowfang weakly. "I am sorry for what...I have done....to ThunderClan."
"Shes breathed in a lot of smoke," mewed Spottedleaf solemnly before turning back to Yellowfang, "Don't speak like that, you've done nothing but good for our clan and you will make it through this."
Yellowfang shook her head, "I broke my oath. Brokenstar was....my son. My punishment for my sins"
Spottedleaf gasped in shock but Fireheart only pretended to be suprised. He had known for some time that Yellowfang had mothered Brokenstar who had then went on to kill his father Jaggedstar. The news had crushed Yellowfang and when he had tried to otherthrow Bluestar with Tigerstar, she had been forced to feed her own son lethal deathberries.
The old grey she cat looked at Fireheart. "Thank you Fireheart for showing my nothing but kindness to me. I wish you had been my son and I am glad to have known you both before my time came."
"Yellowfang, dont say such things..." began Fireheart.
"No Fireheart," interupted Yellowfang, "It is time for me to hunt with StarClan." She craned her neck to see both Fireheart and Spottedleaf. "You two have served your clan well. You both deserve to be happy. Never care what anyone else says. You two deserve happiness." her words trailed off and her sides went still. Tears fell from Spottedleaf's eyes and she buried her muzzle into Fireheart's pelt. He gently licked the top of her head in sympathy.
Yellowfang was dead.

In the nightlight

The sounds of the night filled the air over ThunderClan camp. It had been a week since they had returned to whatever remained of their home. Most distressed were the elders and queens, who had lost their dens. And yet, Fireheart was impressed at the heart warming way in which the clan had banded together in this time of crisis, making repairs to the dens and hunting extra hard. Even Greystripe managed to get Crookedstar to allow him to aid ThunderClan.
"Bluestar," he said one day, "I've been thinking, could I return to ThunderClan?" Firehearts ears shot up when he heard this. Could it be that he was finally going to get his old friend back after so long apart But sadly, it was not to be.
"No," Bluestar almost snapped, "You chose your kits over your clan and now you must live with that choice."
"But Bluestar," meowed Fireheart, "He wants to come back."
"No Fireheart," mewed Greystripe, "I knew the cost when I made the decision to go with my kits." Then without another word, he turned on his paws and left ThunderClan camp. Fireheart merely looked back at Bluestar in silence, at her sad, longing eyes. Was Bluestar thinking about her own decision to leave her own kits, Stonefur and Mistyfoot, in RiverClan so that she could become leader?
"Bluestar," he said, "Are you okay?"
"I'll be fine," she mewed,"Fireheart, thank you."
"For what?" The ginger tom replied somewhat confused, "I havent done much."
"Yes you have," Bluestar replied, "You are the only one in the clan I can trust."
"But Bluestar," meowed Fireheart, "All of these cats would die for you. By StarClan..."
"Don't talk to me about StarClan!" snapped Bluestar, "StarClan told me fire would save our clan but instead it has brought has ruin! StarClan has abandoned us!"
Knowing it would be futile to argue further, Fireheart merely dipped his head and padded away. He knew Bluestar had been shaken by Tigerclaw's betrayel but never would he have imagined

that she had lost all faith in her warriors. Fireheart had never felt so burdened, so...lonely.
"Fireheart, are you okay?"
Caught off guard slightly, Fireheart looked up to find Spottedleaf staring at him worriedly.
"Yeah," he said, "I just have a lot on my mind."
"Too much if you ask me," Spottedeaf mewed softly, "No cat should have to go through what you are alone." She paused and thought for a few heartbeats. "Fireheart, would you like to come with me now for a walk?"
"Um sure," replied Fireheart, "Do you need to gather some herbs?"
"Not really," Spottedleaf shrugged, "I just find that sometimes a walk helps to clear my mind of any troubles and if anyone needs to clear their mind of troubles, its you."
"Thank you," he smiled, "I think I would love that." Quietly the two cats slipped out of camp and into the starlit forest. For a while, they simply padded along in silence, just enjoying the sounds of the forest nightlife. Crickets chirping filled the atmosphere as Fireheart and Spottedleaf slowly made their way through the undergrowth. It was Fireheart who broke the silence.
"Spottedleaf, where are we heading?"
"You will see," was all Spottedleaf replied with as they trotted on. Fireheart smiled and walked closer, briefly brushing his pelt with hers, causing both him and Spottedleaf to blush. Eventually they came to a hollow, lined with marigolds, the flowers giving the clearing a sweet aroma. Spottedleaf took the lead and went and lay in the centre of the clearing.
"I found this place one day when I was out one day gathering herbs," she meowed as Fireheart came and lay beside her.
"Its beautiful," he said as he watched her. Slowly, she turned to face him. Reflecting in her golden eyes, the starlight made Spottedleaf's pelt glow with angelic light.Her sweet scent was more intoxicating to him. Fireheart sighed as he gazed into her eyes. She was beautiful and his heart ached with longing, but Fireheart knew it was futile. There was no way Spottedleaf could ever love him back. The moon shone upon Fireheart's pelt, making him appear like a brand of bright orange flames in the night. Spottedleaf sighed happily, she knew that despite her code, she loved this kind and handsome tom. Sadly, she knew he would never feel the same.
"Thank you Spottedleaf," purred Fireheart leaning in towards her

slightly, "This really has made me feel relaxed."
"I'm always happy to help," she purred leaning towards him. Closing their eyes, the two cats leaned towards each other. They could feel each others shallow breathing. Gently, almost as though they had practiced for it, they licked each others muzzles. No one could say what was going through Fireheart's and Spottedleaf's minds as they had that first forbidden kiss, but whatever they thought, they certainly loved it.
Slowly pulling away, Fireheart blushed and shuffled his paws nervously. Had he really just done that? Had he really just kissed the she cat of his dreams? His mind was racing as he tried to keep his emotions in check.
"I'm sorry Spottedleaf," he mewed quietly as he looked back at her. Spottedleaf was blushing and staring at the ground. "What will she think," thought Fireheart desperately, Would she count it as little more as some harmless accident or had he just ruined their friendship by allowing himself to make some mousebrained mistake?
"It's okay Fireheart," Spottedleaf replied in an almost inaudible voice, "I've wanted to do that for so long now."
Fireheart's ears perked up instantly. Had he just heard her correct ? Did Spottedleaf really just say that she had wanted him to kiss her ? He had to know for sure!
"What do you mean?" Fireheart asked simply so as not to make her feel uncomfortable. Spottedleaf shuffled and slowly looked up, so that Fireheart was transfixed by her amber gaze.
"Fireheart, I know this is against the medicine cat code but...." The very atmosphere seemed to go deathly silent, as though time itself hung on Spottedleaf's next word. "..I love you."
Fireheart's heart soared and he felt a warm glow inside of him. Absolutely nothing could bring him down now. Spottedleaf loved him, that's all that mattered. Seeing Spottedleaf blush and bury her head in her paws as though she had made the biggest mistake of her life, Fireheart purred and decided to put her worries to rest. Gently, he knelt beside her so that his muzzle was level with her ear.
"I love you too Spottedleaf," he whispered, "Always have, always will." Spottedleaf's eyes widened slightly and she slowly raised her delicate head. She stared at him with eyes brimming with love and affection.

"Really?"
Fireheart purred and licked her ear as he lay beside her, "Really."
Purring Spottedleaf nuzzled Fireheart, elated that the tom loved her as she had loved him. They were breaking their codes but neither of them cared. Shining down upon them, the stars seemed to watch over the lovers as they lay with each other in the nightlight.

New blood

Rain poured down from the heavens, pattering on the twoleg place, causing the large bipedal creatures to seek shelter. Two cold blue eyes watched the twolegs as they scarpered from the falling rain. Snorting in disgust, the small black tom turned and jumped down from his lofty perch atop of an old, rusty dumpster. Stretching, he padded over to the small pile of morsels his cats had left for him. Selecting a tasty looking chicken bone, the dark cat walked over to an empty door way and lay there.
Crunching on the bone, the tom studied the cats around him. While others carried on in their own affairs or were busy seeking shelter, others were watching him warily. He could easily see through their eyes into their souls. He saw that some of them hated him, loathed him and yet, not one showed signs any defiance, only a mixture of fear and the utmost respect. Smirking the cat tossed the bone aside, he was among killers. Killers who respected and feared him. This suited the diminutive tom just fine.
Feeling an itch, the black cat scratched at his collar. Rustling slightly, the old, worn purple collar which had once marked his restricted life as a pathetic kittypet was now a fearsome reminder to his underlings of his combat prowess. Teeth and claws studded the band, each a grisly trophy from cats he had fought and slain in combat.
But despite having everything he could have wanted, he was not satisfied. After all these moons of leading his clan, he had not yet found the one thing that he desired above all others. Revenge. He could see the tabby's scornful gaze as he tossed the black kit across the forest, clawing at the defenseless kitten savagely. Since that day, the black tom had sworn that he would find a way to settle the debt against the tabby, if it was the last thing he did. Filling his veins with ice, this insatiable desire for revenge chilled the tom's heart. He would show no mercy.
Upon hearing voices, the black tom looked up. Two cats were padding through the alleyway towards him talking between them, neither was unknown to the tom. The first, a skinny grey furred male, he recognised as being a former member of his clan. He had

served him well until the cat in question had decided to seek a new life in the forest. But it was the second cat that interested him the most.
Larger than most others, the dark brown tabby sported some fearsome scars including a jagged one across his nose, no doubt acquired over countless battles. His amber eyes looked scornfully at the tiny black cat and he spoke to his guide. The black tom smirked inwardly, not only had his chance for vengeance arrived but his soon to be victim, this tabby, was clearly underestimating him due to his diminutive stature . A mistake several cats before him had made and never lived to make it again. Flexing his reinforced claws, the dark tom allowed the newcomers to approach him.
"He's no bigger than an apprentice," snorted the tabby.
"Sshhh," The grey tom hurriedly silenced him, "This may not be a clan as we know it but these cats would kill if their leader ordered them to!"
Smiling inwardly, the small black cat allowed the words to sink in. The grey tom was right. All he would have to do is flick his tail and these intruders would be surrounded and shredded to bloody ribbons by his finest warriors. But no. He wanted to settle this score *personally*.
Slowly he approached them, "It seems I have visitors," he meowed in a tone both calm and menacing simultaneously, "I wasn't expecting to see you again Boulder, I heard you had gone to live in the forest."
The grey tom gulped and nodded. "Yes Scourge, I had."
"So what are you doing?" hissed Scourge, "Have you changed your mind? Have you come crawling back? Do you expect me to welcome you?"
"No Scourge, it's a good life...." But Scourge was no longer paying any attention to Boulder. As Boulder babbled on about life in the forest, he kept his eyes on the large brown tabby, studying him. Too long had he waited for this. He wanted to kill this fox heart now for what he did! But he held back. There was a reason why these two were here and it made sense to find out what it was. Scourge knew he would kill them anyway but knowledge was power and he craved power.
"So what do you want?" he snarled, cutting Boulder off short.
Almost immediately, the immense tabby padded forth.
"I am Tigerstar, leader of ShadowClan," he meowed importantly. Oh

how Scourge couldn't wait to claw the smugness out of him but he merely listened quietly. The time for revenge was close, he could taste it.
"I have a proposition for you Scourge, one that could benefit both of our clans. If all goes according to plan, you could have power and land beyond your wildest dreams." Scourge's ears perked up in interest . Experience told him fine well that this "Tigerstar" could be lying, but whatever he wanted Scourge's aid for, it had to be for something good. Maybe the time had not yet come, thought Scourge. But it would come soon. Very soon,
"Alright Tigerstar," he smirked, "I'm listening."

Secrets

Stealthily, Fireheart and Spottedleaf crept back into ThunderClan camp as the sun rose over the horizon, illuminating the forest in its brilliant light. They smiled at each other and nuzzled their lover before padding back to their dens and lying silently down in their nests. A few hours later, Cinderpelt nudged Spottedleaf awake. The she cat groaned and rolled over, she felt a stabbing pain in her head.
"Come on," chuckled Cinderpelt nudging her again, "I need some help in sorting the medicinal herbs." Yawning Spottedleaf nodded and stood up and went over to the herbs. She smiled as she sorted them, humming quietly to herself. Cinderpelt sat next to her.
"You seem happy," she smiled as she began to sort the herbs alongside Spottedleaf, "How was your walk with Fireheart last night?" Cinderpelt added with a mischievous glint in her eyes.
"It was great," replied Spottedleaf ignoring Cinderpelt's look and instead glancing over to where Fireheart, Sandstorm and Cloudpaw were heading out hunting. Suddenly Spottedleaf felt something turn in her stomach and she groaned. Her sudden anguish did not go unnoticed as Cinderpelt was by her side in an instant.
"Spottedleaf!" she mewed worriedly, "Are you okay?"
"Yeah," meowed Spottedleaf weakly, "I think I just ate somethi...."
But before she could finish, Spottedleaf doubled over and heaved up a stream of yellow vomit. Shakily she got back to her paws, saliva dripping from her muzzle. Gently, Cinderpelt passed her some chervil. Spottedleaf mewed in thanks and quickly snapped up the herb.
"Thanks," she gasped, "That's much better."
"Whats wrong?" asked Cinderpelt, looking at her in a concerned manner.
"Its nothing," assured Spottedleaf , "I'll be fine."
Meanwhile Fireheart was waiting outside Bluestar's den. It was the night of a Gathering and as of yet, Bluestar had failed to choose which warriors would be accompanying her. Finally Fireheart's name was called and he padded into the leader's den.
"Ah Bluestar," he mewed, "I was wondering..."

"I'm not going to the gathering," Bluestar meowed simply as though reading her deputy's mind.
"What?!" said Fireheart trying (and failing} to keep the surprise out of his voice.
"You heard me," she replied calmly, "I want nothing to do with StarClan. Take whoever you wish."
Knowing that it would be futile to discuss this any further, Fireheart bowed in respect of his leader's wish and left the den. Outside the clan cats were already gathering to find out who was going to the Gathering of the clans.
"So who's going," asked Sandstorm, "Who is Bluestar taking?"
Fireheart looked around the ThunderClan cats. How was he going to tell them that their leader had forsaken StarClan and was refusing to go to the Gathering. Scanning the sea of faces, Fireheart searched for some form of help.
"Bluestar's too ill," came Spottedleaf's voice from the back, "She needs to stay in camp so Fireheart will be representing ThunderClan at the Gathering." Fireheart met Spottedleaf's amber gaze and unspoken words of gratitude were spoken between them.
"Oh really?" meowed Darkstripe incredulously, "Who's he taking then?"
Fireheart thought for a moment. He still didn't fully trust Longtail or Darkstripe and didnt want to leave either of them alone in camp.
"I will take Sandstorm, Cloudpaw, Brightpaw, Dustpelt and Longtail. The rest will stay in camp."
As the cats disbanded and prepared to head out, Fireheart trotted over to Spottedleaf, who was sat by a quiet corner at the back of the camp. Quickly looking over to ensure no one was watching, Fireheart pressed his muzzle against Spottedleaf's. The two cats purred as they felt a warm rush of energy surge through their veins. Slowly Fireheart pulled away and gazed into her illustrious golden eyes.
"Thank you my love," he purred.
"It was no problem," replied Spottedleaf smiling but Fireheart could see she was pale.
"Are you alright Spottedleaf? You look pale." he mewed worriedly.
"I'll be fine," said Spottedleaf, but there was something in her voice. Uncertainty.
"Fireheart, we are ready to head out!" came Sandstorm's voice from across the camp, preventing Fireheart from pushing the matter

further, "Fireheart where are you?"
"I should go," he said, "I'm sorry."
"Not it's okay," replied Spottedleaf smiling warmly, "I'll be here when you get back."
Fireheart nodded and left with Sandstorm, Cloudpaw and the others for the gathering. As she watched him go, Spottedleaf gasped as she felt another convulsion and she bent over trying not to be sick. Only two things filled her mind. Love for Fireheart and one other thing. Worry.

The gathering

Silently, the ThunderClan cats picked their way through the scorched undergrowth. Green shoots were already starting to appear, showing that the forest was on the way to recovery. Yet sadly Fireheart knew that it wold not last, for leaf bare was approaching rapidly and without the normal abundance of prey, ThunderClan would suffer through the cold weather.
Soon the warning scents of rival clans filled the atmosphere and the warriors of ThunderClan instinctively became tense. As the group of warriors padded into the Fourtrees, they saw that two other clans had already arrived. WindClan sat in their normal spot as did RiverClan. Both Tallstar and Crookedstar nodded politely towards Fireheart but he could sense what they were thinking. Where was Bluestar?
As the newcomers began to settle, the WindClan and RiverClan leaders leapt upon the high rocks and waited for their counterparts to join them. For a while, Fireheart simply sat and watched, unsure of why little was happening until Sandstorm lightly nudged him.
"Go on," she said softly, "You need to stand up there and represent us."
"I don't know if I should," admitted Fireheart, "I am not Bluestar."
"You will be fine," smiled Sandstorm, "Just go."
Fireheart nodded and padded over to the stones before leaping forth and sitting next to the clan leaders. The moment he did, Fireheart noticed the way that Tallstar and Crookedstar looked at him differently. It wasnt with outrage or anger. Just confusment. For a while they sat in silence until Crookedstar spoke up.
"Young Fireheart," he said, "You must beg my pardon but why are you standing here? Where is Bluestar?"
"I will explain when ShadowClan arrive," replied Fireheart as calmly as he could. He knew he had to be careful about how he explained Bluestar's absence. If he told the truth, that she had lost faith in StarClan, who knew how ThunderClan and more importantly the other leaders would react? But if he lied by saying that she was too ill, the other clans may see ThunderClan as weak and vulnerable.
"Very well," meowed Tallstar at last, "But we may be waiting some

time . No one has caught sight or scent of ShadowClan all night."
Tallstar's prediction proved to be correct. For a couple of hours, the three clans sat in the dark, eagerly awaiting the rival of ShadowClan. Rumours began to spread amongst the warriors like wildfire. Where was ShadowClan? Had they chosen to ignore the wishes of StarClan and not attend the gathering? Surely not! But then what had happened to Nightstar?
"We should begin," said Tallstar impatiently after a while had passed.
"Agreed," meowed Crookedstar in affirmation, "If we waited any longer, the moon will set."
No sooner than had he said these word did a small cat rushed out towards them. He stank heavily of ShadowClan. Bowing as he approached the stones, the cat bowed to the leaders and Fireheart.
"Where is Nightstar?" asked Tallstar impatiently.
"Nightstar is dead," mewed the small tom, "He lost his last life to the great sickness that ravaged our camp."
"Our deepest condolences," mewed Crookedstar sadly, "I take it Cinderfur is leader now." There was a long, uneasy pause, then the ShadowClan cat replied.
"No actually, Cinderfur was one of the first to fall to the sickness. StarClan has sent us a new leader. He is on his way back from Highstones as we speak. That is why ShadowClan is late."
"If the new leader is late," snapped Tallstar impatiently, "Then that is his problem. We have been waiting here all night." All around him, cats yowled in agreement. And yet Fireheart was too caught up in his thoughts to join in with this. With Cinderfur dead before Nightstar and then Nightstar dying before the next gathering, none of the other clans had any inkling as to who the new leader of ShadowClan was. They were in the dark, something Fireheart hated.
Suddenly there came the sound of many pawsteps approaching and soon the shapes of several ShadowClan cats came slinking out of the surrounding darkness. Among them was their new leader.
Fireheart's blood ran like ice the moment he set eyes on the tom. The new leader of ShadowClan was a large dark brown tabby. A jagged scar ran across his nose and perhaps most fearsome were his extremely long claws. Fireheart's worst fears had been realised. The new leader of ShadowClan was Tigerclaw!
Yowls of outrage rose like a crescendo as Tigerclaw climbed the

stone and sat next to the three leaders. Tallstar gave a polite nod while Crookedstar greeted Tigerclaw or rather Tigerstar in the usual fashion. But Fireheart knew that the large tabby was watching him with well hid malice.
"I am Tigerstar," he said at last, "Before Nightstar died, he appointed me as deputy. I have appointed Blackfoot as my deputy. Since Nightstar died ShadowClan has started to recover from the disease that ravaged are camp. More kits are surviving and through my leadership, I hope ShadowClan can be strong once more!" Meows of approval arrose from ShadowClan while the ThunderClan warriors glared at them with barely concealed scorn.
"Well said Tigerstar," said Crookedstar and Tallstar nodded along with him.
"I only hope," meowed Fireheart, "That he treats ShadowClan better than he did ThunderClan." Tigerstar and the other leaders looked at him, and Fireheart knew that they were silently judging him.
"Whatever happened between Tigerstar and ThunderClan can be put aside for now," interceded Tallstar, "Which brings me back to my question of where is Blustar?"
Fireheart exhaled and prayed to StarClan that Tigerstar would not sense weakness in what he was about to say. "As you may or may not know, ThunderClan camp was recently ravaged by fire." He then put in quickly, "We are rebuilding are defenses are hunting well."
Whether it was a sign from StarClan or just pure coincidence, it was at this moment that clouds began to drift in front of the full moon, bringing the gathering to an abrupt end. As Fireheart jumped down from the high rock, he heard Tigerstar calling to him.
"Good luck Fireheart," he sneered, "I hope you and the rest of ThunderClan get the rest you deserve."
As he padded away, Fireheart felt an icy chill run down his spine as he thought of the many cats Tigerstar had "put to rest."

A new threat

What?! How can Tigerstar be leader of ShadowClan?!"
Blustar's loud, shocked yowl filled the camp, her words sending dread into all those who heard them.
"Fireheart....is it true?" mewed Spottedleaf worriedly.
"I'm afraid so." Murmurs of the danger posed by ShadowClan began to spread like wild fire around the camp. Fireheart knew just as well as any cat that nothing good could come of Tigerstar, ThunderClan's deadliest exile, leading ShadowClan, ThunderClan's greatest rival. Part of Fireheart wanted to believe that Tigerstar was no longer a threat. That somehow through becoming leader of ShadowClan, he had sated his thirst for power.
But Fireheart wasnt this naive.
"He's biding his time," thought Fireheart grimly,"It will take time, but he is a competent leader. ShadowClan will soon be back to full strength. and when it is, we need to be ready." Caught up in his thoughts, Fireheart did not notice the petite tortoiseshell figure a pad up beside him.
"Fireheart..." mewed Spottedleaf quietly, "Can I talk to you...alone?"
Fireheart seemed confused by her almost timid tone and as they began to pad towards the medicine clearing, he noticed that Spottedleaf's body language was unusual. After every couple of tail lengths, Spottedleaf would glance nervously over her shoulder as though she thought some malevolent force was insidiously watching her from the trees. Even after making it to the medicine clearing, Spottedleaf seemed tense.
"Spottedleaf, what's wrong?" asked Fireheart trying to look into her amber eyes. Avoiding his gaze for a few long seconds, Spottedleaf finally spoke, her voice quiet and timid.
"Fireheart, I'm worried,"
"Worried?" Fireheart meowed confused, "About what?"
"About us," sighed Spottedleaf, "What if something happens? What if we get discovered and you get exiled? Or what if Tigerstar plans something that gets you hurt....or worse?"
Spottedleaf, its going to be alright," purred Fireheart nuzzling her softly, "We will figure this out and then it will be just you and me."

Spottedleaf looked down as though she wanted to tell him something when a white furred shaped emerged from the ferns.
"Fireheart can I speak to you?" asked Whitestorm padding over quietly taking both lovers by surprise, "I hope I am not interupting but my patrol found something you might want to hear."
"I'm coming," meowed Fireheart. He turned back to Spottedleaf and whispered, "Dont worry, we can figure this out."
"I know we will," she gave a small smile and a small lick on the cheek as h padded away. Fireheart sighed contently before trotting over to where Whitestorm and Bluestar sat.
"Alright what did you find?" he said.
"We were patrolling the WindClan border when we found dog dirt."
Fireheart didn't seemed fazed by this infomation. "That doesnt seem too surprising, twolegs walk their dogs around that area some times."
"We thought so too," replied Whitestorm grimly, "Until we realised that there had been more than one dog. We also found rabbit remains."
"Hmmmm," thought Fireheart aloud, "That does seem more worrying seeing that they did manage to catch something but Im still not convinced. Did you come across any WindClan scents?"
" What do you mean did they come across any WindClan scents?" snapped Bluestar, "Of course it was WindClan, they think ThunderClan is weak. This will not go unpunished!" She stormed off.
"None recent enough to have caught the rabbit." Whitestorm shook his head towards Fireheart
"Well I don't think we should worry too much concerning these mongrels," said Fireheart but seeing the look in Whitestorm's face, the flame furred tom knew that the warrior would not rest easily unless action was taken.
"Increase the number of patrols along the WindClan border and tell them to report anything unusual."
Whitestorm bowed his head and left as Fireheart was left wondering. He severely hoped that this was nothing to worry about because if it wasn't, ThunderClan may not be able to withstand Tigerstar's devious schemes.

Battle for Sunningrocks

Spottedleaf awoke with a yawn. Blinking open her eyes, she surveyed the serene camp. So peaceful. So calm. So beautiful. Suddenly something in her stomach wretched and Spottedleaf gagged, trying to hold back more vomit. Her forehead burning, Spottedleaf staggered outside the warm, sheltered den. Groaning and panting, the dappled medicine could not help but double over and throw up. Shakily she stood back up to full height, only to find herself face to face with Cinderpelt.
"Spottedleaf, I'm worried about you," she mewed.
"I'm fine," lied Spottedleaf, "Its nothing,"
"No its not!" snapped Cinderpelt, "She then lowered her tone, "Sorry but you have been like this for half a moon. I'm worried for you."
"Don't worry," smiled Spottedleaf weakly. However seeing that did this little to change the anxious expression on Cinderpelt's face, she decided to rapidly change the subject.
"Um have you seen Fireheart?" Spottedleaf mewed quietly, "I have to tell him something."
Cinderpelt's expression immediately changed to a mischievious smirk, "Oh I think I know why. He is about to go on patrol with Cloudpaw, Sandstorm and Brightpaw."
"Thank you," meowed Spottedleaf calmly padding away. But inside Spottedleaf was worried. What had Cinderpelt meant by "I think I know why?" Had she discovered Spottedleaf's secret? Silently Spottedleaf wished she hadn't, for it could spell disaster for both Spottedleaf and Fireheart's relationship if she had.
Meanwhile, Fireheart was preparing to lead the border patrol out towards the RiverClan border. Although he felt that he should commit more warriors to guard the border with ShadowClan, neither could Fireheart ignore the threat from RiverClan. Leaf bare was drawing nearer by the day and with it would come hunger. Hunger was more than enough to make cats do reckless things and RiverClan had long contested ThunderClan's ownership of the Sunningrocks. Knowing that it would be foolish to be drawn into a conflict before so harsh a season, Fireheart had decided to send a small patrol to renew the scent markers along the RiverClan border.

"Fireheart, I'm coming with you," Somewhat startled, Fireheart spun around to face Bluestar's firm gaze. "I will lead the patrol."
The ThunderClan leader stood with some remnant of the her once impressive stature that had been one of the many reasons for as to why Fireheart had and still respected his leader. But all the same, Fireheart knew that even like this, Bluestar may not yet be fit to go on a patrol much less lead one!
"Are you sure?" asked Fireheart ensuring that he picked his words very carefully so as not to offend her, "Do you feel up to it?"
Bluestar snorted, "Of course I do. Besides, anything is better than waiting in here for another traitor to stick their claws into my back!" she spat before padding forward. Sighing sadly, Fireheart and the rest of the patrol began to trot alongside her. Sandstorm padded up to Fireheart and whispered into his ear.
"Fireheart, what is wrong with Bluestar, what made her say that?"
Fireheat knew that Bluestar's words had somewhat unnerved the patrol and that he had to settle them. But how could he tell them about Bluestars loss of faith without unnerving them. Then it hit him. He couldnt.
"Bluestar has lost all faith in StarClan," he mewed in a hushed tone, "She has lost faith in her own clan."
"I don't see the point in believing in this StarClan," huffed Cloudpaw, "But to lose faith in her clan is just madness." Brightpaw tried to silence him softly while glancing nervously at Bluestar. If the ThunderClan leader had heard any part of their conversation, she gave no sign and just padded onto the RiverClan border.
Fireheart turned back to Sandstorm, "Tigerstar's return has shaken her very much. All we can hope is that Bluestar will recover soon."
"I know we will be alright," she purred slightly brushing his pelt with hers, "We have you."
Fireheart felt a little uneasy with the way that Sandstorm seemed to be trying to gaze into his eyes. It wasn't that he didn't like her, it was just strange having a she cat mooning after him when he was secretly mates with Spottedleaf.
"RiverClan," hissed Cloudpaw as they approached Sunningrocks.
Suddenly a grey furred shape leapt upon one of the stones and Fireheart sighed when he recognised his old clanmate Greystipe. Any relief however was short lived as Leopardfur and several other RiverClan warriors rushed to his side. Seeing the desparate look in Greystripe's eyes, Fireheart knew that he was torn between his

loyalty to his kits in RiverClan and his old denmates in ThunderClan. Fireheart wished he could comfort his old friend but he knew this was not the time.
"Leopardfur," mewed Bluestar, "What brings you here?"
"Its Leopardstar now," smirked the RiverClan leader, "And I am here for our repayment. RiverClan aided ThunderClan in its most desperate hour and now I demand the Sunningrocks as payment."
Recoiling at this demand, the ThunderClan patrol hissed as they then realised several other RiverClan warriors were closing in, outnumbering the patrol at least by two to one. Looking to Bluestar, Fireheart was shocked when he saw his leader merely standing there. Surely Bluestar was not seriously considering surrendering the rocks without a fight. Quietly, he leaned over to Brightpaw.
"Go back to camp and send for help to Sunningrocks." Bowing her head, Brightpaw scarpered away into the undergrowth.
"Well, " snapped Leopardstar impaiently. "What is your answer?"
"No," hissed Bluestar in return. "The Sunningrocks belong to ThunderClan and we will fight to keep them." At this, Fireheart felt nothing but pride towards his leader. Even with all the grief that she had been put through, Bluestar was still refusing to back down in the face of danger.
"So be it," hissed Leopardstar, "RiverClan attack!"
Leaping forth from the rocks, the RiverClan warriors assailed the ThunderClan patrol. Sandstorm tackled on two cats, hissing and clawing at the warrior in front of her and kicking at the apprentice nipping at her hind legs. Cloudpaw fought against an apprentice, rolling about in the mud until he was able to send the RiverClan cat reeling and fleeing across the water.Engaging a lithe brown tom, Fireheart ducked a claw stripe before lunging at the smaller cat. Using his weight, Fireheart pinned the enemy warrior down, swiping visciously at his ears. Yowling in agony, the tom kicked the ThunderClan warrior off before fleeing back across the river.
Barely having anytime to catch his breath, Fireheart was then attacked by Leopardstar herself. The RiverClan leader hissed a challenge before lunging at the flame furred tom. Nimbly evading the attack, Fireheart swiped back, raking his claws along her pelt. Growling, Leopardstar lunged at him, pinning Fireheart to the ground before the tom could react.
Gasping as the impact forced the air from his lungs, Fireheart attempted to claw at his attacker. Smirking with malice,

Leopardstar lunged for his throat. Closing his eyes instinctively, Fireheart prepared to feel her attack.
Suddenly he heard Leopardstar yowl in agony before her weight was flung off of him. Leaping back to his paws, Fireheart opened his eyes to find Leopardstar grappling with none other than Greystripe. Rushing to his friend's aid, Fireheart hurled himself at Leopardstar. Scoring a deep cut in her flank, Fireheart smirked when Leopardstar hissed in pain.
"Traitor," she spat at Greystripe, "You're lucky I'm letting you live this time but if you return to RiverClan territory again, it will be under pain of death." Then Leopardstar hurriedly disengaged from the battle.
"Thank you Greystripe," panted Fireheart.
"I couldn't let her hurt you ." he meowed in response. Then Greystripe's eyes turned to moons and he pointed down the river bank. "Fireheart look!"
Spinning around, Fireheart gasped in horror at what he saw. Bluestar was being backed into a corner by Stonefur and Mistyfoot. Even at this distance, Fireheart could see the loving look of Bluestar's face, even as the two warriors clawed at her. Fireheart knew that Bluestar would never be able to bring herself to attack her own kits. Fireheart had to interfere.
Racing down the slope, Fireheart placed himself between the cats, shielding Bluestar from the claws of Mistyfoot and Stonefur. Enraged the two RiverClan cats prepared to shred the ThunderClan warriors.
"Wait," pleaded Fireheart, "You cant fight Bluestar."
"Why on earth not," spat Stonefur.
"Because....because she's your mother." Fireheart blurted out. The two RiverClan cats stopped, exchanging glances at one another as though trying to process this new and shocking information."
"You liar," hissed Stonefur, "Greypool was our mother."
"No, no she wasn't," sighed Fireheart shaking his head, glancing briefly back his leader, "Bluestar gave birth to you in ThunderClan but gave you up to RiverClan when you were young so she could protect her clan by becoming deputy."
"Lies!"
"Wait Stonefur," mewed Mistyfoot, "Fireheart never lies."
Before the conversation could continue any further, Bluestar rushed out from behind Fireheart and embraced her kits purring loudly.

Taken completely by surprise, Mistyfoot and Stonefur stood there for a few moments. Then Stonefur slowly pushed Bluestar away.
A yowl rang out across the Sunningrocks and the cats turned to see Brightpaw and the ThunderClan reinforcements, spearheaded by Whitestorm arrive to drive off the invaders. Scowling at Bluestar, Mistyfoot and Stonefur fled across the river.
"Bluestar are you alright?" asked Whitestorm padding up beside her and Fireheart. Cloudpaw, Brightpaw and finally Greystripe followed him down the slope.
"Yes," meowed Bluestar flatly as they padded back, "But I do believe we shall have a ceremony when we get back. Cloudtail proved himself to quite a warrior worthy of the clan."
Fireheart smiled as he watched his fellow warriors congratualte his apprentice. Brightpaw in particular seemed happy, nuzzling Cloudpaw purring. Seeing this, Fireheart felt a little sorry for Brightpaw. If he hadn't sent her for help, she might have also become a warrior. However the apprentice showed no signs of bitterness. Only happiness for her denmate.
Greystripe purred and walked over to Bluestar, "Bluestar, may I rejoin ThunderClan again?"
"Join or stay," Bluestar sighed, "It makes little difference to me."
For a moment Greystripe seemed crestfallen, then Fireheart and Sandstorm appeared at his side.
"Welcome back old friend," purred Fireheart.
"Good to be back," replied Greystripe.
As the battle patrol retruned to camp, Spottedleaf padded slightly sluggishly out of her den. Purring as Fireheart padded over to her,she greeted her love with a lick on the cheek. Smiling widely, Fireheart lovingly nuzzled Spottedleaf. Sighing contently, the Spottedleaf closed her eyes as she listened the gentle, soothing beat of the tom's heart.

Revelations

Help me Fireheart," The desparate, pleading mew rang like a tolling bell in Firehearts ears. Running after Spottedleaf, Fireheart made his way through the ensnaring brambles of the moonlit forest. Suddenly something else filled the air. A harsh snarling that made the tom's fur stand on end.
"Pack! Pack!! Kill! Kill!" It chanted over and over again.
Rounding a bend Fireheart found Spottedleaf crouched under a gnarled tree trunk. Unbelievable horror filled Fireheart's mind as he saw prowling along the branch a large striped cat with a scarred muzzle. Rushing forward to save Spottedleaf, Fireheart was stopped in his tracks as he felt something warm and liquid lapping around his pads.
Glancing down, Fireheart gasped in horror as he realised that he was standing in a rising tide of blood. A sudden thrashing turned his attention back to the striped cat. Struggling fiercely against the blood, the warrior tried feebly to remain above the surface but the red fluid soon snaked its way into his mouth and nostrils, dragging him down. Hearing Spottedleaf yowl once more in pain, Fireheart paddled through the blood towards her. But his limbs were tiring and he was struggling to breathe.
"I'm...coming..." he panted but within seconds, the blood has submerged him and the dappled she cat. All Fireheart saw were two ice blue eyes glaring at him before all went dark.
Waking with a jolt, Fireheart glanced around the den and sighed with relief. It had only been a dream. An awful and terrible dream. His relief was short lived however as Whitestorm came rushing over to him, panic stricken.
" I can't find Brightpaw, " he mewed.
" What?!"
Whitestorm nodded grimly, "According to the apprentices, she and Swiftpaw decided to sneak out last night to go hunting, to prove themselves but they haven't been seen since."
Horrified Fireheart was up in an instant. " Get Greystripe and Cloudtail immediately. We must find them."
After rapidly gathering the patrol, Fireheart began a lengthy,

sweeping search for the missing apprentices. But as time went on with sign of either Swiftpaw or Brightpaw, dread began to fill the fiery tom's heart.
What if the two apprentices had run into trouble? What if Tigerstar found them and tore them to shred? Even though he knew he shouldn't think that way, Fireheart couldn't help the great tabby tearing Brightpaw and Swiftpaw apart.
Cloudtail had unusually silent for the entire journey. Fireheart assumed that the young, white warrior blamed himself for allowing Brightpaw and Swiftpaw to sneak out under his vigil. Deciding that it may not be best Cloudtail such a question, Fireheart trudged towards the Snakerocks. If that what was tuly the as to reason to Cloudtail's silence, he saw no reason to press him for answers.
No sooner than had they reached Snakerocks than did Greystripe chirp. " I've got the scent."
Opening his mouth to taste the air, Fireheart sighed in relief as he also scented the young cats. Then be stopped and raised his hackles as he immediately scented something else nearby.
Blood.
Greatly unsettled by the foul odour, the patrol began to rapidly comb the rocks in search, calling out to Brightpaw and Swiftpaw. But alas it was too little too late.
Rounding a corner, the warriors reeled in horror at what they found. Swiftpaw and Brightpaw were lying horribly mangled in the centre of the clearing. Tufts of fur and pools of scarlet blood filled the otherwise empty clearing.
Cloudtail immediately rushed over to Brightpaw's side and at first Fireheart failed to see the ppint.
" She's alive," yowled Cloudtail obviously distressed at the sight of his friends form, "We need to get her to Spottedleaf and Cinderpelt now!"
Nodding, Fireheart glanced at the prone body of Swiftpaw. Immobile, the stench of death reeked from the apprentice. Grimly Greystripe and Whitestorm lifted the body between them while Fireheart and Cloudtail took Brightpaw.
She was a mess. Blood gushed from her savaged face.Little more than a hollow socket, her left eye showed no signs of sight. Trembling, she struggled to keep pace with the tom's despite their slow speed. Indeed by the time they reached camp, Brightpaw looked about to collapse with fatigue.

Rushing out to meet them, the Clan bombarded them with questions. Gently, Spottedleaf and Cinderpelt took Brightpaw into the medicine den. All the while, Cloudtail never left her side. While Whitestorm kept guard outside the medicine den, Fireheart watched the medicine cats work tirelessly around the wounded apprentice. At last Cinderpelt turned to Fireheart.
" We have done what we can," she mewed weakly, "But her life is now in the paws of StarClan."
"It's all my fault," wailed Cloudtail, "Because I didn't keep a good enough vigil, Brightpaw may die before she becomes a warrior."
Bluestar padded in at this moment having heard the entire conversation. " Relax Cloudtail I know a ceremony that would allow her to get her warrior name before death." She cleared her throat as the other cats looked expectantly at her.
" StarClan hear me," Bluestar forced the words out," May you accept this cat by her warrior name. I name her Lostface."
An appalled silence filled the medicine den. Fireheart and Spottedleaf were both horrified at Bluestar's callousness. They both knew that Bluestar blamed StarClan for every misfortune in her life but never did they believe that she would go far as to vent her anger upon Brightpaw. However it was Cloudtail to actually voice what they were all thinking.
" Lostface is a cruel name," he hissed at Bluestar. But the leader have no reply and padded our. Cloudtail snorted and lay beside Lostface.
" Don't listen to them," he mewed softly, "You will survive and be the best warrior in the Clan." Lostface weakly raised her head, purring quietly.
" Come on Cloudtail," meowed Fireheart,"Let her rest."
"No Fireheart, " replied Cinderpelt, He's perfectly welcome to stay with her for a bit." Fireheart was about to say his thanks to the medicine cats when Spottedleaf appeared beside him.
"Uh Fireheart. .." She practically whispered si quiet was her voice, "May I speak with you...In private. It's important."
"Of course," meowed Fireheart gently. As they padded out to behind the nursery, he couldn't help but wonder what had gotten Spottedleaf so nervous.
" Sorry about Cloudtail, " he said hoping to break the uneasy silence that had settled over them.
" It's okay," smiled Spottedleaf, "He really loves her. I bet you have

seen Cloudtail mooning over Brightpaw." She completely refused to use the abominable name of Lostface.
Fireheart chuckled. " I had noticed him following her around." He then looked at her, "So Spottedleaf, why did you bring me here? What is troubling your my love?"
Spottedleaf then went quiet again. Her golden pools fixed to the ground as she searched for the words. Looking up, she fixed his gaze with her own. It was then that Spottedleaf told Fireheart something which he would never forget. Something that change both of their lives forever.
" Fireheart. ..I'm pregnant. "

Spottedleaf's secret

Silence filled the air as Fireheart stared at Spottedleaf in shock. Shuffling her paws nervously, the dappled she cat avoided his gaze. Studying Spottedleaf's physique, Fireheart began to notice that her once lithe body was now getting rounded. Her paws seemed to be planted firmer into the earth and he had noticed that when she had walked, it had been slower and much more deliberate. The only thing that shocked Fireheart as much as Spottedleaf's pregnancy was that he hadn't noticed it himself!
"How long have you known," he mewed quietly so that any eavesdroppers would be unsuccessful in listening to their conversation.
"About a moon," sighed Spottedleaf glancing down worriedly, "I've been telling Cinderpelt and the others that the morning sickness was purely down to something I ate." She then finally looked up, transfixing Fireheart in her burning amber eyes. "Fireheart, I'm scared. What will happen to us? More importantly, what will happen to our kits? I don't want them to take my kits away!"
Padding over to her, Fireheart gave his mate a calm, reassuring lick on the shoulder. " Don't worry, I won't let anything happen to our kits."
" Spottedleaf is having kits eh?" The cold voice of Darkstripe caused the forbidden couple to wheel around and see the dark tabby disappear towards camp. " The Clan must hear about this!"
Pure dread gripped Fireheart and Spottedleaf. For a moment, they stood in deathly silence, unsure of what to do. Darkstripe had discovered them! What could they do to ensure his silence?
A cold wind then blew over their souls as they realised that there was nothing they could do. Sooner or later, Darkstripe would find a way to expose them to their clanmates. Glancing at each other, they silently padded out into the clearing.
Gathered around Darkstripe, the rest of ThunderClan were listening shocked to the dark warrior's tale. Turning around on hearing their pawtreads, they watched Spottedleaf and Fireheart pad quietly over. No sound, not the chirping of songbirds, not even the mewing of playful kits, dared to break the silence. It seemed that moons

went by without a word.
" Is it true?" mewed Sandstorm, her emerald green optics gazing at the two cats. For another moment, no cat dared to breathe a word.
" Yes," meowed Fireheart, "Spottedleaf is pregnant with my kits."
Lowering her face, Sandstorm took on an unusual meekness while the rest of the clan was in a sudden uproar.
" This is against StarClan's will," growled Dustpelt.
" This is a bad omen," agreed Darkstripe, "We should banish them and their abominable kits."
"Oh will you both shut up!" snarled Cloudtail, "Who bloody cares if they are having kits. If this was anyone else, we'd be celebrating!"
"And what Darkstripe, do you know about Omens? Nothing!" hissed Cinderpelt, fixing Darkstripe with a glare that would have made a badger think twice. Hope flared within Spottedleaf and Fireheart. Despite what they had done, Cloudtail and Cinderpelt never left their sides.
"It is a bad time for ThunderClan," meowed Longtail.
" I don't see why it would be ," It was the valiant Whitestorm to say this, taking the entire clan by surprise. " Spottedleaf is the finest medicine cat in all the Clans. Does one cat here not owe their life to her?"
Ashamed, not one warrior (not even Darkstripe), spoke against the senior warrior.
"And need anyone speak at all for Fireheart." meowed Greystripe. " If not for this brave, skilled and loyal warrior, ThunderClan would have been destroyed moons ago. Or did you mouse brains forget that it was Fireheart to save Spottedleaf from death. That it was him to prove Yellowfang's innocence and defeat Brokenstar. Most importantly, it was Fireheart who exposed Tigerstar as the treacherous fox heart he was. We owe our lives to that tom!"
For a while the clan fell into a series of discontent mutterings until a yowl from the back called for silence. Parting the crowded cats like the red sea, Bluestar padded forth.
" Bluestar," smirked Darkstripe, "Surely you agree that we cannot allow those who break their codes in a way to remain as part of ThunderClan. We should banish them both and elect a new deputy."
" Bluestar. ...please don't," pleaded Spottedleaf quietly, "This Clan is all we have." For one more moment, time stopped as the Clan waited on Bluestar's final decision.
"They may stay," meowed Bluestar at last. "And Fireheart will

remain deputy. " Outraged but not foolish enough to challenge his leader's will, Darkstripe stormed off to hunt. Fireheart sighed with relief and was about to mew his thanks to Bluestar when she began to pad back to her den.
As the rest of ThunderClan began to disperse, Fireheart heaved a hefty sigh of relief. He and Spottedleaf had won. But why? He expected to at least lose his rank. Maybe it was because he reminded Bluestar of herself, Oakheart her forbidden mate and their kits that remained in RiverClan.
A cheering shook himself from his thoughts as Greystripe , Cinderpelt and the others who had defended them padded over to congratulate them.
" Congratulations," smiled Cinderpelt as they padded to the medicine den. " Given Spottedleaf's symptoms, I really should have known."
"While I don't entirely approve of breaking your codes," meowed Whitestorm warmly, "I can't help but admire you for doing for what you believed was right."
The moment was somewhat broken as Spottedleaf doubled over gagging. Hurrying her towards the medicine den, Cinderpelt and Cloudtail settled her down to give her some chervil.
" Thank you Greystripe," mewed Fireheart to his lifelong friend.
"I will always stand beside you," smiled Greystripe, "After all you did for me and Silverstream, it feels good to repay the favour." He sighed as he remembered his late love and their kits in RiverClan.
Fireheart gave him a gentle lick on the shoulder.
" Thanks but don't worry about me," Greystripe reassured him, "Now why don't you go and check on your mate. "
Dipping his head in thanks, Fireheart left him and trotted over to the medicine den. Inside, Lostface was smiling warmly as she lay next to Spottedleaf. Cloudtail was grooming Lostface while Cinderpelt padded over to Fireheart.
" How is Spottedleaf? " asked Fireheart.
" She is well but she is feeling a little emotionally unstable," replied Cinderpelt, "Most Queens are with their first litter."
" Is there anything I can do for her?"
Cinderpelt smiled. " Maybe you could sleep here tonight. Keep her company and reassured. Nodding, Fireheart curled up next to Spottedleaf. Comforted by his presence, Spottedleaf purred and nuzzled hin. Smiling Fireheart groomed her her pelt while curling

tighter around her.
Closing her eyes, Spottedleaf drifted into a calm sleep only to be jolted awake. Fireheart was beside her in a moment.
"What is it?" He asked worriedly.
" I...I think I felt a kick," gasped Spottedleaf. A grin spreading on his face, Fireheart bent down and began to groom her belly. No sooner than he began did he also feel a kick.
Spottedleaf let out a purr of amusement. "Say hello to Dad."
Nuzzling her stomach, Fireheart whispered to her and the unborn kits. "It's okay. I'm here and I will never, ever let anything happen to you." He promised as he closed his eyes and fell into the gentle caress of sleep.

Bad moon rising

A few days passed and it was evident that leaf fall had well and truly arrived. Tossing aside their cloaks of emerald green, the tree's donned a dazzling coat of orange. Falling daintily into the camp, the leaves were eagerly caught by kits and those few apprentices who seemed lose all dignity when a new opportunity to play arose. Yet depite this Fireheart was from relaxed . Leaf bare was always the hardest tine for the Clan and he needed to ensure everyone's safety.
After hearing of Spottedleaf's pregnancy, most of the clan seemed to avoid speaking to either the dappled medicine cat or Fireheart. Sandstorm for instance went silent whenever she was near Fireheart, looking at him with a mixture if longing and sadness. Darkstripe however merely regarded him and Spottedleaf as little more than thorns in his pad to be discarded when he got the chance. Not that he would...at least while Bluestar was looking. Having moved into the nursery, Spottedleaf had temporarily passed on most of her medicine duties to Cinderpelt, who had been eager to oblige. For the most part, the queens had been welcoming to Spottedleaf with the exception of Frostfur, who still treated Spottedleaf with some suspicion. However it wasn't long after that Brindleface announced that she wished to leave the nursery.
It was a cool morning when Fireheart was awoken by a loud yowl of warning. Brackenfur was rushing into camp alone. Just from this alone Fireheart knew that all was not right. Brackenfur had left with Brindleface on a hunting patrol but she had not yet returned.
" Brackenfur what's wrong? Where's Brindleface?" He mewed worriedly.
" Is she not back?" exclaimed Brackenfur, eyes whirling around trying to find her. Roused by the tom's obvious dismay, other cats slowly padded over to investigate.
" No we assumed she was with you." replied Fireheart, "What happened?"
Still panting from his physical exertions, Brackenfur weakly looked up to face his clan. " We were hunting near Snakerocks when we smelt...Tigerstar. We knew we had to get out of there and warn the

clan but then we smelt dogs. Lots of dogs. Barking, snarling, baying for blood! In a blind panic, we panic and got separated..."
"And you've not seen her since?" pressed Cloudtail, Brindleface's adopted son. Solemnly Brackenfur shook his tabby head. Glancing around, Fireheart knew he had to do something now.
" Cloudtail, Sandstorm, Fernpaw, Dustpelt come with me," he ordered, "Brackenfur, can you tell us where you got separated from her. "
"I can do better than that," meowed Brackenfur regaining his composure , "I can show you!"
"The lead the way," nodded Fireheart. Immediately they followed Brackenfur as he scrambled up the ravine and up into the woods. Seeming to conduct their search with a form of calm haste, the patrol scoured the undergrowth for any sign of the lost warrior. Such was their scrutiny that it was not long before the cats came across something.
" I found a rabbit," squeaked Fernpaw excitedly before withdrawing from the fresh kill with a snort of disuse. " It reeks of ShadowClan."
Unsettled,Fireheart and the others immediately began to scan the trees as though at any moment Tigerstar himself would leap out and tear them to shreds. Glancing beside him, he saw Sandstorm padding alongside him silently.
"Sandstorm, are you okay?" asked Fireheart.
" I'll be fine," she replied quietly. Before Fireheart could reply, they heard Cloudtail's mornful howling come from ahead. Piercing his heart like a steel blade fresh from the heat of the forge, Fireheart ran over to where Cloudtail sat huddled over a cold, prone body. Brindleface.
Completely savaged, the she cat's body was hardly recognisable. Blood poured down her face from a deep cut just above her brow. Deep, jagged gashes streaked her flanks. Distressed Fernpaw buried her face into Dustpelt's fur, the older tom whispering sopting things into her ear. Traumatised, Cloudtail nudged Brindleface's cold body but alas it was no use. The stench of death and dogs hung overthe clearing like some ominous cloud.
Then something caught Fireheart's eyes. Had he not glanced to down to avoid looking at Cloudtail's grief, he would have missed the single tuft of rabbit fur. Stooping down to sniff it, he recoiled as he recognised an all to familiar stench.
" Tigerstar did this."

" What?" gasped Sandstorm, "How do you know.'
"Fernpaw, you found a rabbit or two on the way here correct?" enquired Fireheart.
" That's right." She stammered, "Brackenfur too."
" They went from camp to here,"
"Then we don't haveu have time," meowed Fireheart.
" What do you mean?"
"Tigerstar must have been using the rabbits to lure the dogs from Snakerocks here... to Brindleface."
" But why!" demanded Cloudtail.
" To give them a taste for cat blood, " Fireheart meowed grimly casting another look at the savaged body.
"But that would mean..." Sandstorm's voice trailed off.
"They will attack the camp, " finished Fireheart, "We need to get there now!"
" But what of the rabbits? " mewed Fernpaw, "They may lead the dogs there before we can give the warning."
"She's right," agreed Dustpelt, "Cloudtail and I could take them to Sunningrocks to buy you time."
"Very well but if you find any dogs, hide. Do toy here me." He glared at Cliudtail knowing the tom would want to avenge Brindleface.
"Got it" meowed the toms gathering the rabbits and racing off." For a moment, Fireheart wished he could join them. He then shook his head and returned to the remains patrol.
" Come on, we need to warn the others." Sprinting off, they raced towards ThunderClan. " Just pray to StarClan we aren't too late!"

Get out alive

Laying in wait, Fireheart strained his ears for the tell tale scrambling of Greystripe's pawsteps to come thundering towards him. It wouldn't be long now.
Fireheart could still smell the fear scent that had come from the ThunderClan cats upon hearing of the new and impending threat of the dogs. Queens yielding for their kits and elders cowering at the back of the den. It had been Spottedleaf to suggest they hide at Snakerocks, the last place the savages would expect to find them. While they all agreed, the entire clan knew that unless something could be done to stop the bloodthirsty hounds, they would only be delaying the inevitable by going to Snakerocks. Desparate, ThunderClan had no choice but to turn to Fireheart for a plan. This was it. By using a relay team of the fastest warriors, Fireheart hoped to draw the beasts to the cliffs above the river where they would plummet to their dooms.
Heart in his throat, the flame furred tom awaited Greystripe. Terror struck him as he realised that if a single cat was caught, not only would have meant a violent and bloody death for that warrior but the dogs may backtrack to the rocks. Everyone Fireheart cared about was there. Bluestar. Whitestorm who had been asked to ensure the Clan's safety. Worst of all, Spottedleaf. Fireheart grimaced as he imagined his love trapped in the back of a den with several hungry dogs closing in. Her last words to him echoed in his mind.
" Please don't die. We...I need you more than ever. "
A howling and a series of vicious barks snapped Fireheart back to reality. Tensing his muscles to spring out of cover, he readied himself. Then he saw Greystripe appear, the dogs close on his tail. Darting quickly up a tree, Greystripe scrambled to safety. Now it was Fireheart's turn.
Racing out, he immediately heard the snarl of the lead dog and the thunder of their paws behind him as the canines gave chase. Muscles screaming as he powered through the undergrowth, Fireheart began to feel the foetid breath on his fur. He yowled in panic as he felt iron strong jaws close so behind him that they

brushed his fur.
Panting heavily, Fireheart's heart pounded in his ears. He was almost there.
Just a little further.
Drawing in new found reserves of energy, the flame furred tom sped ahead, leaving the dogs behind howling in frustration and blood lust.
Suddenly something slammed into Fireheart, sending him flying. Struggling to stand again, Fireheart was immediately pinned by a large tabby shape. Claws dug into his fur as he tried to throw off his attacker.
" I've had enough of your games Kittypet," snarled Tigerstar, "Now you die!'
Hissing like a cobra, Fireheart threw Tigerstar off and unsheathed his claws ready to shred the treacherous cur. But Tigerstar had immediately be in to flew and it took Fireheart but a moment to find out why.
Wheeling around, Fireheart had just enough time to see the lead dog Before it sank it's dagger like fangs into his soft flesh.
Pain flowed coursed through Fireheart's veins, causing him to yowl in pain, as the monstrous beast shook it's prey violent. Blood filled his mouth and he felt his strength draining. He could hear the howling of the rest of the pack approaching.
" Spottedleaf. Kits," he thought sadly as he tried in vain to claw at the dog , "Daddy may not be coming home again. StarClan save them."
Suddenly he fell to the ground with a thud, rolling away into a nearby gorse bush. When he managed the strength to look up, Fireheart gasped in surprise as he recognised the blue grey storm of fur and claws that had latched onto the lead dog's face.
"Bluestar no!" He called, weakly trying to regain a footing.
"Stay out of this Fireheart!" warned Bluestar attempting to claw out the dog's eyes. "I must do this!"
Forced to obey his leader's will, Fireheart could only watch horrified as Bluestar grappled with her foes. Baying and howling, the dog flailed wildy, trying to throw off the she cat. Then they came.
Unable to stop as they came rushing towards the cliff, the leading dogs' claws scraped against cold stone as the ones behind, oblivious to the danger, forced them on. Fireheart could only watch on

horrified as the pack collided with the dog Bluestar was fighting, sending them all hurtling over the precipice. For a moment, Bluestar seemed to float in the air as though she had wings before she plummeted into the icy waters below.
Rushing down the path to the bank, Fireheart scanned the tumultuous waters. For a while his heart sank when he could find no find of a dog yet alone Bluestar. If a dog couldn't battle these viscous currents, what chance did Bluestar have?
Just as all seemed lost, Fireheart glimpsed a scrap of grey fur among the furious white foam. Forgetting all survival instincts, Fireheart plunged into the rapids and pushed his way towards Bluestar.
Taking her scruff in his jaws, Fireheart gasped for air as he struggled back towards the shore. But the waters were merciless and unforgiving, they would not relinquish their prey without a fight and Fireheart doubted he had the strength to reach the other side
Water filled his airways as he raced to get Bluestar ashore.Then suddenly he felt another cat brush his pelt and for a moment he Houghton he was seeing double. Relief flowed through him as he then recognised the shape of Mistyfoot. To his other side, her brother Stonefur was helping them to carry their mother. Even between the three of them it was a struggle to bring Bluestar ashore.
A sweet scent suddenly filled Fireheart's nostrils. Looking up he saw Spottedleaf burst through the undergrowth, herbs dangling from her jaws while Whitestorm came in behind her, obviously trying to get the she cat back to Snakerocks. Briefly allowing a smile to flicker across his face, Fireheart panted as he and Bluestar's RiverClan kits scrambled up the bank.
Setting her gently down, the trio quietly allowed Spottedleaf to come over and check Bluestar. Only dimly aware of her surroundings, Bluestar panted as she tried to looked at Stonefur and Mistyfoot.
" How did tou get here?" meowed Fireheart about to nuzzle Spottedleaf before remembering that RiverClan cats were present.
"I came because I couldn't bare to just sit around waiting to see if you survived,' she mewed softly as though she were a kit being scolded by its mother, "And when Bluestar ran it, I saw my chance to get out."

"You could have been killed!" Fireheart's tone then grew softer and he gently licked her ear, " But I'm glad you did come."
Smiling for a moment, Spottedleaf hurriedly went back to Bluestar's side and began to examine her.
" Will she make it?' mewed Mistyfoot quietly. For a moment, Spottedleaf went silent then turned to face Mistyfoot, sorrow in her eyes.
" I can't do anything for her now," she mewed grimly," StarClan are calling her to hunt with them."
"Mistyfoot. Stonefur," panted Bluestar , "Are you here?"
"Yes, we are here Mother," mewed Stonefur gruffly.
" Please forgive me..." Bluestar panted, "I never meant to hurt you. I owe Greypool. ..so much. Please forgive me."
For a moment Stonefur and Mistyfoot quietly glanced at each other and for a single horrifying moment, Fireheart feared that they would not forgive her.
"She suffered much for her choice. Please forgive her," he mewed.
For a moment longer, they spoke not a word.
" We forgive you," mewed Mistyfoot. Kneeling down beside Bluestar, Mistyfoot and Stonefur began to share tongues, for the first time, with their mother. Fireheart sighed happily and brushed pelts with Spottedleaf as they watched the scene.
" Fireheart...come here," Bluestar suddenly rasped. Looking up surprised, Fireheart slowly padded over. "Yes Bluestar. "
"I am glad to have mentored you. I know you are the leader our clan needs."
" No you are the leader ThunderClan needs," Fireheart protested, "I could never be as good a leader as you."
Bluestar laughed a dry yet mirthful laugh. " You are so naive but I always liked that about you. You are so loyal, doing what you believe is right regardless of the consequences. You did not seek power for your own gain, only to protect and serve your clanmates as a true leader should. You are to be the fire that will save our clan."
For a while, Fireheart merely gaped at her quietly until Bluestar weakly raised her head and looked at Spottedleaf before beckoning her over.
Taking a seat next to Fireheart, Spottedleaf looked down at her dying leader. "Yes Bluestar." She mewed quietly.
Bluestar looked at then both for a little bit before speaking once

more. "Don't make the same mistake as I did," she mewed watching as the lovers gazed down at her. "Love your kits. Cherish every moment you have with each other in case you wake up one day cold and alone."
"We will Bluestar," promised Fireheart, "We will never forget you."
Bluestar met the tom's emerald gaze with her own sapphire orbs, "Fireheart, don't let her go! Don't even let her go! Save the Clan...they need you. Now I must go. Oakheart....I'm coming."
Then she went silent. No longer were her grey flanks rising and falling gently. Fireheart nuzzled Spottedleaf softly as they stared at Bluestar's cold, lifeless body. Silence filled the air as the forest grieved for he loss of one of the greatest leaders in Clan history.
"We should bury her in ThunderClan," meowed Fireheart sadly, "It's what she would have wanted."
"Yes Firestar," mewed Whitestorm.
"Just Fireheart for now," the tom reminded him as her helped to pick up Bluestar's body.
"We want to help Bury her," meowed Mistyfoot.
"She was our mother,' agreed Stonefur. Spottedleaf looked at Fireheart as she stood beside him to help lift the body. Fireheart nodded.
"Of course," she mewed Gently, "She will be remembered as a great warrior and a good friend." Quietly the cats began to trudge back to ThunderClan camp, bearing the body between them as hough it were a holy icon. Rain pelting down from the heavens, it seemed that even StarClan mourned the loss that ThunderClanhad suffered. The age of Bluestar was over. The time if Firestar had come!

Rising star

Stonefur and Mistyfoot had left ThunderClan territory shortly after the ceremonial vigil and burial had taken place for Bluestar. Although he was sad to see them go, Fireheart could not ignore nor deny the powerful feeling welling up inside him. He was leader of ThunderClan now and only now did the true meaning of the title weigh down upon him like highrock itself. He was responsible for these cats and whatever happened to them. Every grievous wound. Every jagged scar. Every life that ended before it was necessary. Shaking his head clear of such dark and melancholy thoughts, Fireheart scanned the clearing for Cinderpelt. Sat in the medicine den, the grey furred medicine cat was wincing as Spottedleaf dabbed a bitter scented poultice over her crippled leg. Quietly padding over, Fireheart entered the medicine den and sat down alongside them.
"Cinderpelt," he meowed, "I believe that it is time for you and I to travel to the moonstone." Briefly he glanced at Spottedleaf. The dappled she cat looked worried and for one dreadful moment Fireheart was afraid that he had offended her in asking Cinderpelt to go with him. Had Spottedleaf not been so close to kitting, Fireheart would have jumped to have her make the most important journey of his lifetime with him. But when she spoke, it was a soft and gentle tine as smooth as fresh honey.
"Cinderpelt has been complaining that the pain in her leg has been acting up fiercely."
" Spottedleaf has given me some poultice to help ease the pain," Cinderpelt meekly put in. "But she and I both agreed that it would be best not for me to travel today."
"But what about my nine lives?" enquired Fireheart, "Without a leader approved by StarClan, Tigerstar may see us as weak." An uneasy silence passed as Spottedleaf and Cinderpelt glanced at each other, unspoken words being said between them. Awkwardly, due to her extra pregnancy weight, Spottedleaf stumbled to her paws.
" I think I could escort you...if that's what you would like?" She mewed looking Fireheart in the eye.
"Of course it's what I would like," he replied instantly, "But I was

wondering if you should go since you could be kitting any day now. "
Spottedleaf gave him a light hearted purr, "I'm sure I could manage to make it to Highstones and back. What kind of medicine cat would I be if I couldn't?"
Encouraged by her unwavering spirit, Fireheart smiled and helped her out of the den a land out of the camp before setting off on their journey to the Moonstone. Before leaving, Cinderpelt has given them the special herbs needed to sate their hunger for the long journey and Fireheart requested for Whitestorm to see to any clan matters in his absence.
Now as they padded through the forest, Fireheart and Spottedleaf began to weave their way through the dense undergrowth towards the barren moorland of WindClan territory. Slowing down to allow his expecting mate to keep up, Fireheart gently, lovingly nudged Spottedleaf onwards like the way a mother she pads her kits into the nursery.
Upon reaching the border, the ThunderClan couple paused and warily sniffed the air. Although cats were not allowed to be challenged on their way to Highstones, neither Fireheart nor Spottedleaf could ignore the trepidation that they felt crossing into the ancestral hunting grounds of WindClan. Feeling comforted the familiar scent of each other as they stalked through the thick heather and moorland grass, the two cats made their way through WindClan territory.
For the most part, the passage over the moorland was relatively uneventful bar encounter Tallstar leading a small hunting patrol. Saddened by the news of Bluestar's tragic demise, the WindClan leader simply said that all the cats would mourn her loss and wished Fireheart a happy life as leader.
Now as they finally approached Mothermouth, the monstrous entrance to the sacred Moonstone, a chill blew over Fireheart far colder than any wind from the moors. Would StarClan even accept him as leader of ThunderClan after he had mated with Spottedleaf? What if they didn't? What would happen to ThunderClan then?
"Are you ready? " Spottedleaf mewed quietly beside him, momentarily making Fireheart forget his worries. Inhaling calmly, Fireheart looked back at Spottedleaf. No matter what happened, if StarClan accepted or rejected him, he would do his best to defend her and the clan.

" Yes," he replied in which he hoped had been in a calm voice although it had been a little shaky. Smiling, Spottedleaf signaled for him to enter Mothermouth. No sooner than had they taken a signal step inside did Spottedleaf grunt in obvious discomfort. Rushing over to her, Fireheart gave her a nervous lick on the ear as he sought to comfort her.
" What is it?" He pestered, "Are you alright? You shouldn't have come!"
" Calm down," Spottedleaf said glancing at her stomach, "It was just a kick. I'll be fine, honestly." However the look in her eyes did little to comfort Fireheart as they padded into the deep dark beneath Highstones.
A cold wind blew through their pelts as Spottedleaf and Fireheart padded through the ancient tunnel. Up ahead they could see a faint glowing light at the end of the tunnel. Growing in intensity, the glow threatened to blind the cats as they finally approached the Moonstone . Casting one last glance at his beloved mate, Fireheart touched nosed with the great rock, a wonder that had stood since long before the coming of the clans. Instantly his felt a spark of cold energy rush through his veins as a wave of unyielding darkness swallowed him, body and soul.
When at last he found the strength to open his eyes, Fireheart found himself standing back at Fourtrees. For a moment, he was confused as though he had no idea or recollection as to what had brought him there. A rustling from the bushes behind him caused the ginger tom to wheel around so that he now came face to face with nine cats. Fighting back the urge to yowl out their names as they silently padded towards him, Fireheart instantly recognised all but two of the spirits. Bluestar stood at the front of the group, the proud and mighty leader she had been when he first joined ThunderClan. Behind her to the left, stood the figures of Swiftpaw, Runningwind, Brindleface and Yellowfang. Looking just as bad tempered as she had been in life, only one as close to her as Fireheart would have been able to pick out the trace of warmth in the old, grey she cat's eyes that betrayed her true feelings.
To the other side of Bluestar sat a tom with a red tail and it took several instances for Fireheart to recognise Redtail, the former ThunderClan deputy who had been murdered by Tigerstar's brutal ambition shortly before his own arrival to the forest . The cat was none other than the proud figure of Greystripe's own mentor

Lionheart.
However the scents of the final two cats surprised Fireheart the most, for it was not the scent if ThunderClan that they carried but the distinct scent of RiverClan! Then he remembered that all clans were united in StarClan, making it unsurprising that these two RiverClan cats were able to take part in naming the new leader of ThunderClan. Studying them, he instantly recognised Silverstream, the poor silver tabby queen who had died bearing Greystripe's kits. When he asked her if there was anything she wanted him to say to Greystripe, Silverstream said nothing but the longing in her eyes conveyed all the feelings in the world that mere words could not do justice to. The final was a brown furred tom that Fireheart felt that he should know and yet could not recall seeing him either in life or death. Then when he saw him glance at Bluestar briefly, he understood him to be none other than Oakheart, Bluestar's forbidden mate and the father of Stonefur and Mistyfoot.
" Fireheart, step forth," commanded Bluestar. Compelled forward, Fireheart bowed his head in reverence to his fallen friend and leader.
" Fireheart do you swear to protect and lead ThunderClan through good tomes and hard times. To defend them and the warrior code above all other things."
"I do, " Fireheart could barely could the excitement out of his voice but he tried. The StarClan cats nodded pleased and stepped back with the exception of Brindleface. Quietly padding over to Fireheart, she touched her nose to his.
" I give you a life to defend and protect the clan in the way in which a queen protects her kits," she mewed. On contact with her nose, Fireheart almost dropped to his paws and screamed in a gone as a burning wave of pure energy flowed through him as he was granted the life. Whether the pain lasted a second or a moon, he could not say but by the time he looked up, Brindleface had rejoined the others and it was now Silverstream padding forth.
Touching noses with the RiverClan she cat, Fireheart felt another fierce surge of burning energy flow through him. As if seeking to soothe him, Silverstream whispered softly in his ear.
" Thank you so much for what you did for me and Greystripe, Fireheart. In gratitude, I give you a life to do what you believe is right."
Although it did little to soothe the actual, physical pain that still

threatened to overwhelm him, Fireheart was comforted by her soft words. Then as quickly as she had padded over, Silverstream returned to the others and let the next cat, Swiftpaw step forth and so it went on. No matter how bad Fireheart thought the pain could get, the pain got worse each time. Each cat gave him a life for a different and equally noble purpose. From Yellowfang, he received a life for wisdom while Oakheart gave him a life for compassion in thanks of Fireheart liking after Bluestar in her darkest hour. By the time after which Redtail had given him a life for truth, Fireheart, bloodied but not bowed, could only weakly turn his head towards the only cat to yet give him a life.
Padding slowly forward Bluestar gently placed her head on top of the ginger tom's. "Fire will save indeed save ThunderClan. I've known that ever since I brought that feisty but naive, young cat into my clan." She purred.
" That was such a long time ago." Fireheart mewed quietly, reminiscing in the fond memory of when he had first joined ThunderClan. He had been little more than a kittypet back then but that day had changed so much for him. Without it, he would never learnt the honour of the warrior code or the thrill of hunting for the Clan. Most importantly he would have never have met his now dear friends. Greystripe, Whitestorm, Cinderpelt, Sandstorm. Spottedleaf.
"I am proud to have mentored you Fireheart," Bluestar smiled touching her nose to his as the others before her had done. Surprisingly however, Fireheart felt that this life renewed his strength, making him feel that he could run forever and face an entire clan of the most viscous warriors single handedly.
" I, Bluestar give you a life to give you the strength and will to lead your Clan. From this moment on, you are no longer the warrior Fireheart. From this moment henceforth, this tom shall be known as Firestar, leader of ThunderClan! May StarClan light your path."
As the other StarClan cats started heeling his new name, Firestar couldn't help but feel a great deal of pride. Finally he was leader of ThunderClan and he could right the heinous crimes of Tigerstar. Suddenly everything went silent and Firestar found this dismay, the StarClan cats had disappeared. Horror shook hin as he saw in their place, a tide of crimson blood lapping around his paws. Fighting his gag reflex as the stench of carrion filled his sensitive nostrils, Firestar recoiled at the new and terrible sight before him.
Jutting out of the blood like some kind of monstrous mountain

amongst a sea of red, an immense pile of cracked and gnawed bones, fangs and claws stood. Scuttling out of crevices in the remains, vermin snatched the bones before drawing then back off into the darkness.
Horrified, Firestar forced himself to gaze up to the top of the pile. Silhouetted against the dark sky was the figure of a small cat. Although he could not make out the markings or the facial structure of this strange cat, Firestar to the end of his days would never forget the eyes. The piercing, cold, blue eyes.
Snarling in disgust, the cat kicked something down towards Firestar. Flopping lifelessly at his paws, two lifeless, amber eyes looking up at him, blood spilled from the tabby filling the ever deepening pool of blood.
Snapping awake, Firestar panted and ran over to Spottedleaf. Wretching and groaning in agony, the tortoiseshell gave no sign of noticing Firestar until his gently licked her ear in a soothing way.
"Spottedleaf, what's wrong?" He mewed anxiously. Panting, Spottedleaf looked back at her mate, amber eyes wide as her body convulsed violently in pain.
" Firestar, the kits are coming!!!"

New life

Rushing over to her side, Firestar began to drown Spottedleaf's side in licks in a vain attempt to soothe his mate. However Firestar knew only to well the danger for a queen who went into labour without a medicine cat's herbs as he memory flashed back to Silverstream.
"Do you think you can make it back to camp?" Firestar mewed nudging Spottedleaf slightly, while trying to keep the pure fear out of his voice. Spottedleaf shook her head woefully.
"Then we need to find a safe place for you to kit in peace," he mewed, gently helping her to her paws. With a sense of calm haste so as to not stress Spottedleaf or her kits further , the ThunderClan couple left Mothermouth. Carried by an icy wind from the moorland, the stale scent of a WindClan patrol informed them that for now at least, it was safe to pass back through the territory .
Although she tried to remain quiet, Spottedleaf could not help but grunt in pain every few steps as new spasms of pain rippled through her body. Seeing Firestar's anxious expression, she forced an uneasy smile and forced herself ever onwards.
Suddenly a new jolt of pain forced a yowl of anguish from her lips. Feeling her strength drain from her body as rapidly as water from a melting stream runs down a mountain in new-leaf, Spottedleaf winced as she forced herself to lie down. Padding over, Firestar tried anxiously to get her to her feet but Spottedleaf knew it was futile. Resigning himself to sitting beside her for comfort, Firestar watched his mate with trepidation.
" Is there anything I can do to ease your pain?" Firestar mewed while he fussed over her. Stiffling a grunt of pain, Spottedleaf was about to answer, when a rustling came from the nearby grass and the scent of two toms filled the air.
Snarling as he lowered himself into a hunter's crouch, Firestar stood ready to challenge anyone who threatened his family.
Then a black head poked itself out of the grass and Spottedleaf noticed Firestar visibly relax at the sight of his old friend Ravenpaw. Sniffing the air, Ravenpaw slowly approached.
" Fireheart. What's wrong with Spottedleaf?" He almost yowled in obvious alarm.

" She's going into kitting," Firestar meowed , glancing back at her.
" Please, can you help us?" Begged Spottedleaf in agony as she felt another spasm before Ravenpaw could question as to why a medicine cat was kitting in rival territory.
"Barley's barn isn't far off," mewed Ravenpaw, a hint warmth in his eyes, "If we can get you there, you should be safe."
Without any better plan of action to avoid a WindClan patrol or worse, Firestar and Spottedleaf agreed. Between them, the two toms were able to delicately lift the she cat between them and trudge towards the sanctuary of the warm, welcoming barn. On the way, Firestar hastily explained the situation while Ravenpaw listened thoughtfully. Spottedleaf had her eyes wielded shut for most of the journey as pain threatened to overwhelm her. Only when the enticing scent of mice and straw combined with Barley's gentle greeting alerted her that they had at last, finally arrived. She thought that she heard him say, "Get her inside," But so focused was Spottedleaf on the excruciating pain that wracked her body that she couldn't be certain.
Gently Firestar lay her down on the soft straw while Barley listened to Ravenpaw. Lying amongst the straw, Spottedleaf began to pant weakly as a great thirst came over her. Sensing this, Firestar ran off and retrieved some moss soaking with water collected from a nearby puddle. Purring gratefully if a little weakly, Spottedleaf lapped up the drops, thinking it to be the most delicious water she had ever tasted.
" Is there anything we can do for you Spottedleaf?" Meowed Firestar worriedly, giving her a gentle, comforting lick over the ear.
"A s-stick!" Spottedleaf yowled as she felt a kit beginning to arrive. Briefly the toms just stared at each other before another screech from Spottedleaf compelled Barley to rush off and return with a stick which looked like it had be hastily ripped from a tree branch. Mewing her thanks, Spottedleaf clamped the stick between her vice like jaws, threatening to snap it instantly.
"Push!" Firestar encouraged his mate. Clenching her jaws ever tighter against the brittle stick, Spottedleaf began to push. Pain greater than anything Spottedleaf felt in her entire life shot through her veins, causing Spottedleaf to almost collapse in agony. But she forced herself on for the sake of her kits.
A soft rustling amongst the straw behind her and a pathetic high pitched mewing announced the arrival of the first kit.

" Lick it," Spottedleaf mewed, muffled by the stick in her mouth as she tried to wheel around and see her kit. Instantly, Firestar was beside the kit, vigorously licking it until the birthing sack broke, allowing the kit to breath. Ever so gently, Firestar pushed the mewing kit into Spottedleaf's warm belly.
"It's a she cat," he told Spottedleaf. As she bent down to nuzzle her daughter, Spottedleaf inhaled the kit's sweet scent. To Spottedleaf, it was the most beautiful thing she had ever smelt. Paddling with tiny paws, the dark ginger she kit suckled. One of her paws had a single white sock and there was a brownish tint to her ears.
Another painful spasm followed by a high pitched mewing sounded the arrival of another kit. Hurriedly Ravenpaw began to lick the kit before nudging it alongside it's sister. Another she kit, this one was similar in stature to the first but instead displayed a tan pelt with tabby stripes the same colour as parts Spottedleaf's pelt. She had a dash of white on her chest and paws. Soft, plump, pink paw pads kneaded her mother's belly until the milk began to flow, allowing her to suckle.
" Only one more," Spottedleaf faintly heard Barley say, "You can do it!"
Nodding weakly as Firestar continued his noble if vain efforts to comfort her. Biting down so hard that the stick began to splinter in her mouth, Spottedleaf gave one last push and finally the last kit was born.
" Yet another beautiful daughter," purred Firestar gently placing the young she kit amongst the others. Smaller than her sisters, this last kit had tortoiseshell markings almost identical to her mother, however streaks of bright orange sporadically marked her pelt including one that ran down the right side of her face.
Purring.loudly, Firestar curled around his family, grooming Spottedleaf while she let the kits nurse hungrily for her warm milk. Still panting slightly, the tortoiseshell queen managed a weak purr which only grew when Ravenpaw and Barley appeared with two freshkill mice.
" Here you two need to eat, especially you Spottedleaf." Barley meowed as they dropped their mice in front of Spottedleaf and Firestar. Dipping their heads in thanks, the cats ravenously gulped down the succulent prey in a few snaps of their jaws.
" What are you going to call them," enquired Ravenpaw gesturing with his black tail toward the three sleeping kits, nestled in their

parent's fur.
Looking at each other then the kits, Spottedleaf and Firestar talked in hushed whispers before turning back to Ravenpaw and Barley.
" The dark ginger one we are naming Squirrelkit." mewed Spottedleaf pointing with her tail to the sleeping bundle of fur curled up beside her.
"This one will be Leafkit, " Firestar continued pointing to the light brown tabby.
" And what about the other?" prompted Ravenpaw pointing to the small tortoiseshell. For a moment, Firestar and Spottedleaf were silent as though they had not agreed upon a name.
A sudden flapping from the rafters caused the cats to crane their necks to see a flinch fly out of the barn. But as it did, a solitary feather floated gracefully down until it came to a rest on the unnamed kit's nose. Sneezing the feather off, the kit crawled quietly into the warmth of her mother's belly. Then as one Spottedleaf and Firestar seemed to agree on a name without physically talking between them.
"Finchkit."
" Wonderful names for wonderful kits." Smiled Barley. As if then sensing that they wanted some privacy, Ravenpaw and Barley then dipped their heads and retired to another corner, allowing the family of newborns some much deserved peace.
A comforting silence filled the barn, bar the insistent scratching of mice on floorboards and the occasional mew of a tiny kit. But then no words needed to be said between Firestar and Spottedleaf as they gazed lovingly at their daughters. Enjoying the warm touch of each other,, they shared tongues before falling into a deep, contented, hay scented sleep.

The arrivals

Setting off as the sun began to rise, Firestar and Spottedleaf bade farewell to Ravenpaw and Barley before setting across the moorland. Dangling limply from their parent's jaws, the kits silently slept as the cats headed for the ThunderClan border.
As Spottedleaf was still a little weak from the kitting, Firestar carried Squirrelkit and Leafkit, thus meaning that only Finchkit had to be carried by her mother. Swaying slightly in Spottedleaf's jaws, Finchkit was only noticeable by he occasional streak of orange that prevented her from perfectly merging into the medicine cat's pelt. Visibly relaxing as they crossed the familiar scent markings of ThunderClan, Firestar noticed that Spottedleaf was exhausted and so suggested that the have a brief respite hidden a mig the reeds. Dipping her gratefully, Spottedleaf lay down and gently nudged Finchkit so that she could nurse. Softly Firestar placed Squirrelkitand Leafkit beside her. For a while they sat in comfortable silence as the kits fed.
A sudden rustling from across the river caught Firestar's attention and he stalked close to the border to peer out. Carried by the wind, a strange scent drifted towards Firestar. What made this scent peculiar was that instead of the fishy smells associated with RiverClan, this was the horrid reek of a ShadowClan warrior! Waiting silently, Firestar and Spottedleaf held their breaths so as not to give away their position. Soon enough a white furred tom padded out of the reeds on the RiverClan side of the border. It was Blackfoot, Tigerstar's deputy! Calmly sniffing the ground for prey, the ShadowClan cat showed no signs of fear or unease of being in a rival clan's territory. As of suddenly sensing their eyes watching him, Blackfoot glanced toward Firestar and Spottedleaf's hiding place. The ThunderClan couple hardly dared to move as Blackfoot scrutinised he reeds. However if he sensed them, Blackfoot gave no sign and padded away back casually upstream.
Sighing with relief, Firestar and Spottedleaf picked up their kits and padded back to camp. Although they said nothing, both cats were both thinking the same thug. Why had Blackfoot been on RiverClan territory? He had been far to casual to suggest that he had been on

a mission. Perhaps he had betrayed Tigerstar for a life in RiverClan. But Firestar doubted that was the case. Blackfoot was far too loyal to his clan and Tigerstar in order to do that. So what was his business in RiverClan and did it bode ill for ThunderClan?
Reaching the tunnel of brambles that marked the entrance to the clan camp, Spottedleaf followed closely by Firestar pushed their way in. Almost immediately, the couple were swarmed by their clanmates.
" Your kits are beautiful," cooed Cinderpelt, nudging Leafkit slightly.
" This one looks so much like her father," meowed Whitestorm padding over to Squirrelkit. As the senior warrior approached, Squirrelkit kicked out with hwr hind paws hitting him across the nose. " She has his fighting spirit too," chuckled Whitestorm earning a ripple of quiet laughter from the rest of the clan. Only Darkstripe remained silent, choosing to scowl at the new kits from the back of the camp as though they were ticks that needed to be removed.
Sandstorm padded over to the kits and for a moment just stared as though she could no longer deny their existence. Gently touching her nose to Finchkit, she gave out a quiet purr.
"Im glad she makes you happy." Although this had been meant to show reconciliation, Firestar swore he detected a hint of sorrow as Sandstorm looked at his kits.
Nodding Firestar turned to face the highrock. Scrambling up the ancient stone, Firestar sat as he a dressed the clan, his clan, for the first time.
"May all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather under highrock for a clan meeting."
Padding over, the warriors of ThunderClan gathered to form a semi circle around Firestar. Spottedleaf watched from the nursery with the other queens while Cinderpelt and Lostface sat by the medicine den.
" I have been given nine lives by StarClan," Firestar meowed, "I promise to lead this clan with honour and compassion. To put your needs above my own and as my first act, it is time to elect a new clan deputy. I say these words before StarClan so they may hear and approve of my choice."
On their way back from Barley's barn, Firestar had had much time to choose a deputy. At first he had thought of Greystripe but he knew that his friend was still readjusting to life in ThunderClan and would be thankful not to be given the extra duties. Sandstorm was a

skilled hunter and a competent warrior but alas has not mentored an apprentice. But even if she had, Firestar had deep down always known who his choice would have been. A strong and intelligent warrior who's advice was welcomed by any member of the clan and who's honour was second to none.
" Whitestorm shall be the new ThunderClan deputy," he announced. Wide eyed, Whitestorm stared at Firestar, clearly not expecting to have been given the tremendous honour of becoming ThunderClan deputy.
" I thank you Firestar," he finally magazine to say, "I swear I will do all within my power to protect this clan."
A loud cheer of approval immediately followed this and Firestar knew instantly that he had made the right choice. "Long live Whitestorm! Long live Firestar!"
" I have one more task," said Firestar, "Lostface, step forth."
Quietly the young, scarred she cat stepped forth.
" You have proven yourself a worthy warrior of ThunderClan. Despite sustaining injuries that would have driven most other cats to despair, you have trained hard to learn how to serve the clan. As such I think it fitting for you to have a proper ceremony. Do you promise to follow the warrior code and protect this clan even at cost of your own life."
Lostface's eye lit up. " I do."
"Then by the power of StarClan, I name you Brightheart. ThunderClan honours your skill and dedication." Leaping down from the rock, Firestar rested hus head on Brightheart's in accordance with ancient tradition. Licking his shoulder, Brightheart mewed quietly, "Thank you," while the clan called out her new name. Loudest of all was Cloudtail who ran and touched noses with Brightheart, both cats purring loudly.
" Now unless there is any further business, " meowed Firestar, "I would like to close this..."
" RiverClan inbound!" Snarled Longtail. No sooner than had he said this did a battered, blue grey she cat throw herself into the clearing. Firestar immediately recognised Mistyfoot.
" Stand down," he told his warriors who had begun to circle Mistyfoot. " Let her speak. Mistyfoot what is wrong?"
Panting for breath, Mistyfoot struggled to form words as Greystripe and Sandstorm gently helped her up. Her eyes were wide in pure tail.

" Tigerstar has forced Leopardstar to join him. RiverClan is now part of TigerClan. Although Leopardstar claims she is sharing power we all know who is in charge."
A tide of outrage tore through ThunderClan.
"How dare he. There have always been four clan, " yowled Dustpelt.
" He cannot use the name TigerClan, " growled Smallear, "He disgraced our ancestors. "
"StarClan help us all," muttered Firestar.
" That's not the worst," she panted, "He claims half clan cats are disloyal and should be destroyed. Stonefur. Featherpaw and Stormpaw. He is going to execute them!"

Rescue mission

Shocked murmurs rippled through ThunderClan camp threatening to become a crescendo until Whitestorm called for order.
"We must help them!" yowled Greystripe, the sheer terror for his kits readily apparent in his voice.
"Why should we?" sneered Darkstripe, "That is a RiverClan affair. Besides those cats should never have been born in the first place."
If Darkstripe expected support from this comment, he was to be severely disappointed for immediately outraged yowls challenged the dark warrior. Even Longtail, who Darkstripe had considered his ally, seemed to recoil in horror at his words.
Firestar looked around the sea of faces as they turned to looked at him. These cats were depending on him to lead them. But that also that also meant that he was responsible whatever happened to them. Any wound. Any scar. Any death. It would be his fault. Was this what it was like to be leader, Firestar wondered.
Glancing around, Firestar found his gaze being drawn to the nursery. Inside he could faintly make out Spottedleaf as she tried to calm the kits by curling around them. Mewing as they scrambled blindly about her, the litter was soon nestled within her soft fur.
The sight melted Firestar's heart and he knew instantly what he must do. His kits were similar to the half clan hostages, they should not exist according to the code. But that did not in anyway mean that their lives meant less than that of any other cat. Unsheathing his claws in anger of Tigerstar's malice, Firestar knew he would defend those kits to his last breath.
"We leave immediately!" He called, "Greystripe, Sandstorm, Brightheart and Cloudtail will come with me. Whitestorm, you are in charge of camp until my return." The white tom nodded in affirmation.
"At any cost these cats are half ThunderClan," Firestar, "They share your blood and I say this, we will not suffer our own to torment and death!"
Cheering in agreement, the clan dispersed into their groups. Thick enough to cut with the stroke of a claw, the tension hung over the warriors like some malicious deity as it consumed their minds.

Padding into the nursery, Firestar was greeted by the sight of Spottedleaf nursing the kits. Seeing hwr mate enter the den, Spottedleaf suddenly looked worried, concern filling her amber eyes. Firestar knew she was worried for him and for a while they sat in silence simply enjoying one another's company.
"Be safe," Spottedleaf pressed her muzzle to his cheek. " I don't want to imagine life without you. "
"You won't have to," Firestar replied gently licking her ear. " I'll be fine."
Worried but knowing that he had to do this, Spottedleaf nuzzled him one last time before Firestar reluctantly left the nursery. It pained them both to be apart but they reasoned that they would see each other before the day was through. Or rather they hoped.
Joining the rescue party, Firestar was about to signal to move out when Mistyfoot, supported by Cinderpelt, limped over.
"Please save them," she begged, her eyes brimming with worry.
"Don't worry, we'll bring them back. That's a promise," Firestar meowed determinedly before flicking his tail and joining the battle group as they disappeared into the forest like the morning mist.
Racing through the undergrowth, Firestar glanced quickly at the cats around him. Forming a pair, Cloudtail and Brightheart weaved through the trees in a blur of white and ginger fur. Alongside him, Sandstorm raced on, determination written on her facial features. But most imposing of all was Greystripe.
Surging through the ferns and brambles, the grey furred tom blazed a trail for the rest of the party to follow. His amber eyes burned fiercer than the very flames which had threatened to consume the entire forest. Gazing into his soul, Firestar saw only a grim determination and a will who's strength was only ever hinted at in the ancient legends. Greystripe had lost Silverstream. He would not lose his kits!
Up ahead, the splashes of the running river could be heard as the ThunderClan warriors approached the border. Breaking of the ensnaring brambles and ferns, Firestar studied the terrain. After deciding that the best way to reach RiverClan camp was to cross the stepping stones, Firestar lead them downstream until they found the stones and crossed the white foaming waters.
Leaping into RiverClan territory, Firestar's fur instinctively bristled and he unsheathed his claws for fear of being jumped by a pack of defending warriors. But no one came.

" Tigerstar must have called them all to watch the execution," meowed Firestar thoughtfully.
" That makes our job more difficult, " Greystripe meowed grimly.
"Cloudtail, Brightheart," Firestar meowed somewhat curtly, "Bring up the rear. I don't want to risk this being a trap." Nodding the two warriors took up their position and the cavalcade set off deeper into the unfamiliar reaches of RiverClan territory.
A cold wind blew from the west, bringing with it a stench of carrion. Fighting his gag reflex, Firestar continued to pad on as the sound of many voices began to fill the atmosphere, getting louder as they approached the camp. Signaling the patrol to halt as they neared a wall of reads, Firestar took Greystripe stealthily forward and they gazed into the camp.
Sat atop a grisly throne of bones and skull or prey, Tigerstar watched as Blackfoot and another ShadowClan tom dragged a bloodied and beaten tom before him. With a jolt of alarm, Firestar recognised Mistyfoot's brother, Stonefur the RiverClan deputy. Bleeding from a dozen deep cuts in his flank and one jagged scar running down the length down the length of his face, Stonefur looked up at Leopardstar who say beside Tigerstar, although it was clear who was truly in command.
The stench from the bones was overwhelming to the point that Firestar had to he his breath. His eyes suddenly flashed as he recognised the terrible effigy from his vision.
" Leopardstar," Stonefur growled, "You can't let him do this! This is not the way of the code."
"Silence traitor," spat Tigerstar, "You are nothing more than a vile half clam piece of fox dung."
"Absurd," Stonefur growled, "I have served RiverClan my whole life. I myself only found out about my heritage recently."
"Hmm true," mused Tigerstar milling the thought over. As he turned to Leopardstar, Firestar in turn faced his warriors.
" Sandstorm," he whispered, "Take Cloudtail and Brightheart and hide in the bushes to the left of Tigerstar. Wait for my signal before attacking. "
Nodding quickly, Sandstorm padded off with the other two warriors to await the signal.
Tigerstar's voice returned Firestar's attention back to the RiverClan camp.
" What you say is true Stonefur." rumbled Tigerstar, "If you wish to

prove your loyalty you must kill the half clan apprentices." Feeling Greystripe tense beside him, Firestar gasped as he saw Russetfur herd Stormpaw and Featherpaw in front of Stonefur. If they were to strike it had to be soon. Stormpaw growled as he attempted to shield his sister.
" I won't let him kill us," Firestar had to admire the young tom's courage in the face of overwhelming odds.
" Do it," sighed Leopardstar, "We must obey Tigerstar."
"Kill them!" snarled Tigerstar.
" You'll have to kill me first, " growled Stonefur unsheathing his claws.
" So be it," Tigerstar's voice was oddly calm as he turned to Blackfoot. "Finish him. "
"With pleasure," smirked the tom leaping down at Stonefur. Grabbing the RiverClan by the scruff, he tried to sink his teeth into his neck only for Stonefur to claw his face, forcing him to let go. Staggering back, Stonefur shielded Featherpaw and Stormpaw.
" Give up," sneered Tigerstar as more warriors joined Blackfoot, "Your death is inevitable."
"Don't count your prey before it is caught." yowled Firestar, making Tigerstar wheel around in shock, "ThunderClan attack!"
Leaping out of the reeds, Firestar powered towards Blackfoot, tackling the large white tom to the ground. Yowls from not far away alerted him that Sandstorm and the others had joined the attack. Hissing he raked his claws across Blackfoot's muzzle. Growling Blackfoot pushed up with his hind paws sending Firestar flying off. Before he could retaliate however, Firestar saw Stonefur smash into Blackfoot knocking him off balance. The RiverClan tom the rushed to join Firestar.
"I see Mistyfoot managed to get help," he panted.
" Yes,"Firestar replied, clawing at a ShadowClan tom who dared to get too close, "Now let's get out of here." He then yelled for all to hear."ThunderClan, withdraw to the river! Go now."
Reacting immediately to his order, Greystripe and his kits bolted out of the camp. Allowing Stonefur to lean against him for support, Firestar followed his friend while Sandstorm, Cloudtail and Brightheart defended the rear before in turn disappearing into the tall plants.
Ringing in their ears, the yowls of the pursing cats only served to add flight to the paws of the ThunderClan cats. Although Stonefur 's

wounds slowed them down, Firestar and his party managed to keep up a fair pace and arrive at the stepping stones before Tigerstar. By now the clam river had turned into a raging torrent, white foam splashing against the rocks.
" Brightheart, take Stonefur across. Greystripe, you take Featherpaw and Stormpaw. We'll follow."
Briefly casting a glance at the violent waters then back at her leader, Brightheart nodded and made the first jump with Stonefur close behind.
No sooner than had they make it half way across, did Tigerstar leap from the bushes, murder and malice burning in his eyes.
"Greystripe go!" yowled Firestar tackling Tigerstar without looking to see of his order was actually being fulfilled. Snarling in rage, Tigerstar swung his claws at the flame furred tom. Feeling the claws brush his pelt as he evaded, Firestar returned with a kick from his hind claws, scoring a hit across the tabby's muzzle. Claws flashed again as Tigerstar sort to strike a blow, his face contorting itself into a cruel sneer as he drew blood from Firestar's flank.
Suddenly something charged into Tigerstar, forcing him to briefly disengage. Sandstorm turned to Firestar.
" We need to go now before more arrive," she meowed before leaping onto the first rock, just behind Cloudtail. Noticing TigerClan warriors beginning to appear, Firestar leapt after her.
Steadying himself as he landed on the treacherous rock, Firestar sighed with relief as he saw Stonefur scramble up the other back. Behind him, Firestar heard Tigerstar order his minions after the fugitives. Not daring to look back, Firestar began to leap from stone to stone as the water crashed around them. A yowl behind him signaled one TigerClan warrior falling into river. Firestar sent a silent prayer to StarClan that they wouldale it across.
Suddenly Featherpaw yelped as she lost her footing attempting the final jump. For a split second, her paws touched air before a flash of white fur seized her by the scruff and pulled her ashore. Fighting the urge to yowl loudly lest he lose his footing, Firestar smiled as he saw Whitestorm, Longtail and Dustpelt help the other cats scramble up the bank. Leaping across beside them, Firestar dipped his head in thanks to the senior warrior.
" When you hadn't returned, I assumed you needed help," Whitestorm remarked.
"Your timing is perfect," panted Firestar. Turning around, Firestar

saw Tigerstar stood two stones away. From the look on his face, Firestar could tell he was weighing up the risks of attacking the full ThunderClan battle patrol. For a few terrifying moments, Firestar thought that in his rage, Tigerstar would attack, and he unsheathed his claws ready to fight.
But even in his rage, Tigerstar was not foolish enough to attack at least eleven battle ready warriors over a bottleneck as thin as the stepping stones.
" I won't forget this Kittypet," he hissed before turning around and leaping back across the river.
Breathing a sigh of relief, Firestar allowed himself to relax and turned back to face the party.
"I thought we were dead," panted Stonefur, "We owe you our lives Firestar. "
"You owe me nothing," Firestar smiled, shaking his head, "Let's get you back to ThunderClan camp. You will be safe there."
As the patrol turned on its heels and headed bacl to camp, Firestar couldn't help but wonder if the camp was safe and if it was, for how long?
But he kept this to himself.

The trial of Darkstripe

Padding slowly back into camp, Firestar was put on immediate alert when he heard hisses coming from near the nursery. Racing over, he unsheathed his claws ready to fight off any invader that Tigerstar may have sent in order to harm or steal the kits. However as he reached the nursery, Firestar was shocked to see Spottedleaf, Longtail, Bramblekit and Tawnykit circling Darkstripe angrily while Goldenflower looked after Squirrelkit, Leafkit and Finchkit inside the relative safety if the nursery.
"Don't you ever touch my kits again!" shrieked Spottedleaf lunging at the dark warrior before he had the chance to evade. Yowls split the air as Spottedleaf latched onto Darkstripe, slashing at him furiously with unsheathed claws while he tried to throw her off. Looking on in shock, Firestar instantly recognised the anger that Spottedleaf was displaying toward Darkstripe. He had felt it when Brindleface had given him a life. A red furious rage that suppressed the combatant's own survival instincts. How else would Spottedleaf, a medicine cat trained in only the basics of fighting, so openly attack Darkstripe, a seasoned and dangerous fighter of ThunderClan. Spottedleaf was a queen defending her litter!
" Quickly! Separate them before she kills Darkstripe!" Firestar ordered and immediately ran over. Pulling vigourously on her scruff, it took the combined might of Firestar and Greystripe while Dustpelt and Whitestorm dragged Darkstripe out of harm's way. Quickly nuzzling her, Firestar managed to calm down Spottedleaf to such am extent that she would be able to explain.
" What happened here? " He demanded.
"I was on my way back to the nursery from making dirt," said Bramblekit, "When I saw Darkstripe carrying Finchkit out of the nursery. Since Spottedleaf was asleep, I guessed that he was up to something and told Spottedleaf. Darkstripe was so shocked he tried to run but Longtail stopped him and to on Finchkit back to the nursery while Spottedleaf cornered Darkstripe . Then you arrived Firestar."
Glancing at Spottedleaf for an answer, Firestar was slightly shaken at the state that his mate was in. Her eyes were blazing amber

flames and her claws tore up the earth in great big tufts. Finally she looked up at him and nodded.
" What Bramblekit says is true."
Firestar looked at the dark warrior. Scowling at his clanmates with barely concealed malice, Darkstripe drew his lips back into a threatening display of fangs. If the dark warrior was guilty, he was making no attempt to conceal his crime.
" May all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather under highrock for a clan meeting!" Firestar yowled leaping to the top of his lofty perch upon he ancient stone. Looking down from highrock, Firestar watched as the rest of the clan filtered out to take their places at the bottom of the stone. Escorted by Greystripe and Dustpelt either side of him, Darkstripe was thrust out into the centre of his peers.
"Since our return from RiverClan territory, " Firestar's voice rang out acrossthe clearing, "I have been given evidence to suggest that one of of our own stole a kit from its mother, endangering the kit's life. Darkstripe, how do you plead to these charges?"
Foul mutterings began to spread amongst the congregation of warriors as they glared evilly at Darkstripe. Darkstripe himself however remained eerily calm.
" I'll admit I did it," he sneered, "And I would gladly do it again. Too long have I had stood back and let you transform our noble clan into a haven for kittypet, half clan cats and medicine cat's who can't follow their code," This last remark was spat at Spottedleaf causing a further uproar among the clan cats. At this point Firestar began to wonder if Greystripe and Dustpelt were guarding Darkstripe to stop him escaping or to prevent the clan tearing hom asunder before he received his sentence.
" Darkstripe, " he yowled, "What you did was unforgiveable. As punishment, you are banished from ThunderClan territory. If you are found on our land after tomorrow, any cat will have the permission to kill you on sight. "
" Fine," snapped Darkstripe heading for the gorse tunnel, "I shall head to a clan with a real leader. Tigerstar will treat me as a hero." And with that he was gone.
" Now that is over," Firestar's tone lightened, "It is time to do something that has been out off for some time now. Bramblekit, Tawnykit step forth."
Excitedly Bramblekit stepped forth with Tawnykit looking less eager

following him, taking their places at the bottom of the stone.
" Bramblekit, do you promise to follow the warrior code and protect this clan even at cost of your own life."
" I do," purred Bramblekit happily.
" Then from this point on I name you Bramblepaw, ThunderClan honours your skill and dedication. I shall personally mentor you."
Leaping down, Firestar touched noses with Bramblepaw before placing his head on the young tabby's, allowing Bramblepaw to lick his shoulder as part of the ancient ceremony.Firestar then turned to Tawnykit.
" Tawnykit, do you promise to follow the warrior code and protect this clan even at cost of your own life. "
For a while there was a long uneasy pause before Tawnykit shook her head sadly.
" I am sorry Firestar,' she mewed, "But I feel that while I remain here, cats will only see Tigerstar and not Tawnykit. I...I think I should leave."
" Tawnykit, no!" Bramblepaw mewed sadly.
" I must brother, maybe in ShadowClan they will welcome me."
Instantly murmurs of disgust began to rise.
" Enough of that" ordered Firestar as he padded over to Tawnykit. " Is this what you want?" He asked gently.
The kit nodded.
" Greystripe, " Firestar meowed, "Escort her safely to the border."
"At once Firestar," he grey tom nodded whisking Tawnykit out through the gorse tunnel. As the cats then began to disperse, Firestar looked at Bramblepaw.
" I'm sorry, but I couldn't have her stay of she was miserable."
"I understand, " mewed the young tom, "I just can't believe that she's gone.
"Get some prey and rest," smiled Firestar warmly, "We'll train tommorrow."
Blinking gratefully, Bramblepaw padded off to the freshkill pile.
"You did the right thing letting her go," Spottedleaf said from behind Firestar. As he turned, Firestar saw his mate standing beside Longtail.
" We can't thank you enough Longtail," Firestar truly meant every wry as he spoke it. The pale warrior may have had reason to be doubted before, but no longer. Not only had he saved Finchkit but he had stood up to Darkstripe, showing his true loyalty to Firestar

and ThunderClan .
"After all you have done Firestar," Longtail dipped his head, "It felt good to repay you."
He then padded off leaving Spottedleaf with Firestar. Gently he brushed against her pelt, her sweet scent engulfing him.
"How are you holding up?" He enquired.
" I'm fine," replied Spottedleaf nuzzlig his cheek, "I just hope that is the last is we see of Darkstripe." She then paused. " Shall we see the kits."
"I would love that,"Firestar purred following her into the den.
Lying down in the nest, Spottedleaf was instantly greeted as the kits rushed over to feed.
" Mama?" mewed Squirrelkit, blinking open her emerald green eyes for he first time in her life.
" That's right dear," Spottedleaf purred, "She has your beautiful eyes Firestar."
Firestar nodded smiling and he pressed his cheek to his daughter's.
" And I'm your father,"
Squirrelkit purred before yawning widely and curling up on her father's paws. Right now, Firestar felt as though all the troubles of the world had melted away to be replaced by Spottedleaf's comforting presence andthe gentle breath ignore their kits and they suckled.
Unbeknownst to the ThunderClan couple, a great danger was about to reveal itself.

Gathering darkness

The night over the land seemed unusually peaceful as the large black and white tom weaved his way through the labyrinthine alleys that made up Twolegplace. Padding than an alley darker than even it's dismal counterparts, the tom stopped and bowed his head as he approached the small black cat sat in rotten door way.
"We have received word from Tigerstar," he meowed gruffly, "He wants us to move to the "Fourtrees" and prepare for a battle."
"Thank you Bone," replied the diminutive ebony tom, "Gather Brick and the others. Prepare to move on my order."
As the Bone nodded and quickly ran off, as though even he was glad he no longer had to endure his presence, the black tom closed his eyes and smirked evilly to himself.
"Soon they will see. They will all see!" He muttered to himself as he lay down and closed his icy eyes . Unconsciously he unsheathed his claws, taking great enjoyment as he imagined the blood letting to come.
" You don't have to do this," squeaked the tiny mew of a young kit.
Opening one eye, the older cat regarded the kit with a look of utter contempt. " You can still change Scourge."
"Who are you to stop me?" He snarled, "I killed you ages ago. You are nothing but a bad memory that will soon fade into the black oblivion. Tiny is no more!"
Tiny, trembling but still defiant, stood a step towards Scourge, despite that for the first time in his life, Scourge was far larger than he.
"Why must you kill?" Mewed the kit, "Why not quit this life and find a nice housefolk. They will look after you. No more hunting, no more...."
"What have they ever done for me," growled Scourge, "They were going to throw us away. Worse kill us or have you forgotten what happens to unwanted kittens."
" They get ..." Tiny faltered, only making Scourge more impatient.
" Thrown in the river!" He finished, lashing his tail angrily from side to side causing the terrified kit to squeal and ty to back away but Scourge stopped him. " Besides even if they did want me now, I

wouldn't want them. I have everything a cat could want! Prey, territory, followers and after tonight, when my revenge on the forest scum is complete, I shall be remembered as the greatest cat ever to ha he walked the face of this miserable world."
Glancing back down at Tiny, Scourge noticed that the kit's eyes were wielded shut. His fur was standing on end and Scourge expected him to leave him right then and there. But Tiny did no such thing and even the leader of BloodClan was impressed at his considerable if foolish courage. Then again, Tiny was Scourge.
" But why do you do this?" Tiny asked quietly, "To what end do you hope to achieve through this?"
Revealing his fangs as he twisted his face into a dark sneer as he padded menacing towards Tiny.
"That's the beauty of it," he smirked, "By removing the forest scum and gaining the promised territory, my power will be absolute. After that there will be no purpose but we will still fight and kill any who dare oppose us. And why? No other reason than that we may revel in the bloodshed for that is who we are! We are BloodClan!"
Unable to comprehend what Scourge was saying, Tiny backed away hurriedly but found himself against the wall. Narrowing his eyes, Scourge lunged at the weak part of hom, ready to rend and kill. Suddenly his blue eyes flickered open as he heard cats approaching. Stood before I'm was a.mighty host of warriors, cats trained and tested in the ways of bloodshed and slaughter, the way of BloodClan. At the vanguard stood bone and a lithe dark red she cat, Brick.
Stretching his muscles, Scourge padded over towards them, noting how the general chatter of he cats had instantly died as he approached. Glancing back at the wall from his dreams, Scourge saw no apparition of his former sense. He was the leader of BloodClan and nothing, no code, no error would stop him from achieving his goals.
" Let's move," he meowed softlyyet menacingly, "It is time to make ourselves known."

The shattering of peace

Sleeping softly within the sheltered confines of the nursery, Squirrelkit, Leafkit and Finchkit snoozed unaware of the storm of war that gathering around them.
Spottedleaf gently bent down and gave each of her daughters a small lick on the ear before looking back at Goldenflower. The older queen had the litter of kits tucked in close to her stomach.
" Are you sure they will be alright without me," Spottedleaf fretted worriedly as only a queen can for her newborn kittens.
" Relax," soothed Firestar alongside her, "Goldenflower will be more than capable of looking after them."
For a while Spottedleaf glanced at Firestar then gazed longingly back at her kits.
" Let me stay with them please," she begged, threatening to then push Goldenflower out of the nest and climb in to nurse her kits.
"No," said Firestar firmly but kindly, "Cinderpelt and I both agree that you need to get out of the nursery for a bit and the gathering is a perfect opportunity." Ever since the birth of her kits, Spottedleaf's usual unwavering kindness and generosity had been coupled with a mother's instinct to love her young. While this did mean that not only the kits, but indeed anyone who came into contact with Spottedleaf would be instantly fussed over and treated with great affection, it did however mean that Spottedleaf spent a lot of time in or near the nursery, only leaving to travel as far as the medicine den to help Cinderpelt and even then she would grow restless until she could return to her litter.
"I assure you they will be fine," smiled Goldenflower, "No off you go."
Sill unsure, Spottedleaf finally padded with Firestar to join the others attending the gathering. Bramblepaw was looking at the older cat's with a look of anticipation and fear. He had been training hard since he had been made an apprentice just a half moon ago. Even though Spottedleaf knew her mate had his doubts about the young tabby, she knew that Firestar was impressed by Bramblepaw's enthusiasm and skill. He would make a fine warrior.
" Whitestorm and Longtail are remaining behind to guard the camp.

Stonefur will stay in the medicine den ," Firestar meowed, "The rest of you follow me," Without another word, he turbed on his heels and darted into the undergrowth with his warriors in pursuit.
The journey to the gathering was relatively uneventful and upon arriving the ThunderClan warriors suspected that all was peaceful. Then the saw the cats of WindClan!
Huddled in the centre of the clearing, a pitiful band of WindClan cats led by Tallstar warily watched the ThunderClan warriors. Freshly formed cuts snaked across their bodies and tufts of fur had been savagely ripped out from each warrior. They looked like they had been through the dark forest and barely lived to tell the tale.
" Tallstar!" Exclaimed Firestar rushing over, "What happened?'
Before Tallstar could even open his mouth, a deep throated maniacal laugh echoed through the clearing. Stepping out of the shadows, Tigerstar smirked as he padded over to the leaders with Blackfoot and Leopardstar behind him. The former leader of RiverClan looked pale and powerless in the face of Tigerstar's brutal ambition.
"I can answer that," the tabby sneered, " I offered WindClan a chance to join us and they refused. So naturally we decided to show them the error of their ways."
"You savages," snarled Tallstar, "You killed Gorsepaw."
Firestar's eyes widened. He had carried Gorsepaw when he and Greystripe had returned WindClan to their home. Casting a glance over, he saw Spottedleaf attempting to soothe Morningflower. If Gorsepaw's mother knew the she cat was there, she gave no sign.
" I shall repeat my offer," Tigerstar snarled, "Join me and live, or die."
" Never, " snapped Firestar,"You promise power and equality but you deliver only slavery and death."
"I expected this much from a kittypet and a half clan friend," sneered Tigerstar evilly. A yowl came from the back as Dustpelt restrained Mistyfoot from rushing out and evicerating Tigerstar. " What about you Bramblepaw."
" Never growled," Bramblepaw, "You're a twisted evil tom and must be stopped!" While Tigerstar snarled in rage, Firestar smiled at his apprentice. By rejecting his father, Bramblepaw had proven himself loyal to ThunderClan.
" What about you Tallstar? " Tigerstar hissed
"Fox dung! " growled Tallstar, "I will fight you until the end.

WindClan shall side with ThunderClan to strike you down."
Pride flowed through Firestar and he could not deny the feeling of admiration he felt towards Tallstar. Even though he had been battered and beaten, the WindClan leader refused to bow his head in submission to Tigerstar's malice.
" So you would rather side with a clan led by a kittypet, who let's apprentices leave to join their rivals," At this moment, Firestar glanced at Tawnypaw. Eyes lowered, the young she cat showed only revulsion towards her sire.
Tigerstar went on. "A clan in which the medicine cats can't even follow their code. Or did you not hear? The latest ThunderClan litter is that of Firestar and Spottedleaf!"
Immediately murmurs began to race around the gathered cats. Backing towards Firestar, Spottedleaf spooked Darkstripe among the ranks of Tigerstar's warriors and hissed. Only by gently licking her on he ear was Firestar able to prevent her from launching herself at the dark tom.
"Even if they did break the code in that regard, " Tallstar glanced warmly at Firestar then glared at Tigerstar. " He has more honour than you and I would sooner die by his side than live by yours." He then got up and padded over to sit beside the ThunderClan cats.
"Here here," yowled Onewhisker ad he and the remaining WindClan cats rushed to join Firestar.
" So be it," snarled Tigerstar baring his fangs, "But know this, with their last breath your warriors will blame ou as they drown in a tide of your blood. BloodClan, show yourselves!'
Slinking eerily out of the shadows like a pack of malevolent spectres, a large group of cats began to enter the hollow. Adorning theit necks with collars but from the teeth and claws that lined them, Firestar knew that these were no pampered kittypets but cold hearted killers. Takin up ranks beside TigerClan, the BloodClan warriors formed silent ranks beside Tigerstar. Already they outnumbered he clans and more kept coming.
At the head of the mysterious warriors was a large black and white tom. Powerful muscles rippled under his fur and his collar was adorned with teeth. As he sat with Tigerstar, Firestar assumed this cat was the leader.
Then another tom appeared, no larger than an apprentice. For a moment, Firestar believed that this may have been the BloodClan medicine cat. Then he saw the eyes.

Looking up, the tom glanced at the ThunderClan cats with icy blue eyes. Holding no warmth within their frozen depths, the eyes showed no signs only compassion or empathy, only a cold unfeeling distance such as that as a hunter regards his prey, combined with a hidden, far darker meaning.
As the tom sat down, Firestar could make out more this newcomer. His frame, though small, was lithe and powerful. His fur was a deepest ebony that would have shamed night bar a solitary white sock. Long curled claws reinforced by hollowed out dog fangs tore up the earth impatiently. Studded withore teeth Han any other, his purple collar bore testament to the diminutive warrior's combat prowess, a series of trophies taken over countless battles.
"Time to meet your end fools," sneered Tigerstar, "BloodClan attack!"
Immediately dropping into various combat stances, he warriors or ThunderClan and WindClan prepared to fight side by side against the combined might of BloodClan and Tigerstar. But no cat moved.
" With all due respect Tigerstar," meowed the small black tom, "You may have offered us territory, but this is my clan and mine alone. They will fight when *I* say." He then turned to Firestar. " My name is Scourge and I am the leader of BloodClan."
For a while, Firestar simply stared finding it hard to believe that such a small cat was I charge of such vicious cats. Only by looking at Scourge's collar was he able to believe it. Then it hit him. Perhaps of if he told Scourge what Tigerstar was like, maybe Scourge would withdraw from Tigerstar's side and maybe even join ThunderClan.
"Scourge," bowed Firestar, "I am sure your intentions are noble but you are making a mistake. Tigerstar cannot be trusted."
"Don't listen to him. Remember our deal Scourge,' hissed Tigerstar but the surprise of everyone, the tiny tom silenced the tabby with but a glance. Scourge the regarded Firestar.
" Tigerstar told me he had enemies in the forest which does mean you could be lying. " For a moment, Firestar's heart sank as he realised he may have to face the black tom after all.
"However," Scourge continued,"I don't like sending my cats to die without good reason. I will listen to your words."
Firestar's hopes soared. He had a chance, small if maybe, but a chance to draw support away from Tigerstar.
" Cats of all clans," he yowled, "Tigerstar cannot be trusted..." From

the on he went to tell about how Tigerstar had killed the deputy Redtail and the tried to betray Bluestar alongside Brokenstar in a desperate bid for power. Disgusted yowled rose up from the crowd and Leopardstar glared at the tabby as though she were about to dissolve the alliance between ShadowClan and RiverClan then and there. Scourge however remained passive.
Firestar then went on how to describe how Cinderpelt had been injured in a trap Tigerstar had set by the road for Bluestar, getting hit by a monster. Looking over at Cinderpelt, Firestar could she was just as shocked as everone else. She had never seen it coming.
He then went on to describe how Tigerstar had attacked using the dogs and had ordered the execution of the half clan cats after manipulating Leopardstar into giving him effective power of RiverClan.
"That is Tigerstar's history," he finished," It shows that he will do anything for power and that he won't share it with you or anyone else."
For a moment the clearing went quiet as Scourge paused to think. Spottedleaf quietly leaned towards Firestar.
" Do you think Scourge will join us?" She mewed quietly. She hid her fear incredibly well as she regarded the tom.
" I hope so," Was all Firestar could go honestly say, "If not, this could get messy real quick." He then dropped his voice lower, "If this does turn into a fight, I want you to run back to ThunderClan, take the kits, Cinderpelt, *everyone* to safety and don't look back."
"You're mad if you think I will leave you," Spottedleaf hissed softly.
"Please." Firestar mewed, "For me."
Before Spottedleaf could answer, Scourge looked up again and spoke to the gathered cats.
"This indeed has been an interesting turn of events," he meowed, "I will think about what you have said Firestar. There will be no battle today."
Relief flooded through Firestar. Even if Scourge hadn't promised to draw his forces away from Tigerstar, he was at least considering it.
" You traitor," snarled Tigerstar turning to Scourge, claws unsheathed.
"I am not your servant," smirked Scourge coldly, "I never was, so don't you dare presume to command me."
Tigerstar roared a blood curdling battle cry and launched himself at the small tom. The atmosphere went quiet as every warrior held

their breath and waited for Scourge to be rendered limb from limb. However to the frustration of Tigerstar, Scourge danced out of the way of the well timed pounce. Enraged, Tigerstar hacked and slashed at Scourge with tom and claw in a fury of blood lust. But he could not hit Scourge.
Snarling in challenge, Scourge rushed Tigerstar and with an almost contemptuous flick of his claws, slashed open Tigerstar's neck. Gurgling as blood well up in his throat, Tigerstar fell to the ground with a thud. Scourge was standing over him in an instant.
"Remember me?" Scourge hissed into the dying tabby's ear. What exactly these cryptic words meant, neither Firestar no Spottedleaf quite knew but it was clear that from the flash of realisation in his eyes that Tigerstar did.
" You." He gurgled as blood pure out of his mouth, staining the ground crimson.
" That's right," smirked Scourge darkly, "I never did forget."
As Tigerstar lay there dying, Firestar couldn't help but feel both shocked at the relative ease at which Scourge had defeated the warrior but also relief hat Tigerstar was one step closer to being permanently gone. But even he wouldn't have wished upon Tigerstar what Scourge did next.
Raising his claws, the BloodClan leader then slashed his long claws through Tigerstar's under belly. Giving a violent shudder and an agonised crt, Tigerstar's body then fell silent only to be reanimated and subject to the unbearable torture. Spottedleaf hid her gaze in Firestar's fur as the fiery tom fought his own feelings of revulsion and horror.
Tigerstar was dying nine times!
When at last the body fell silent, instantly panic and chaos arrose from the ranks of the ShadowClan warriors who darted around the clearing in serve panic. Scourge mean whole, who had been watching Tigerstar's death with a sadistic pleasure, brought his paw down heavily down upon the tom's jaw. With a sickening crunch, a tooth rolled out and was instantly snapped up by Scourge and pushed through his collar to join the other trophies.
" Your fried thought he could control us," he sneered as he turned to Firestar, who was for once speechless, "He was wrong. This forest is ours now. I will give you three days. You may join me or leave but if you remain in this forest, I will slaughter you down to the last kit." At these words, Firestar felt Spottedleaf's muscles tensen.

" Until then, " Scourge meowed calmly as though this were all normal, "Farewell."
Silently, he turned and left the clearing. Following the silent call of their leader, the BloodClan cats slunk away back into the shadows leaving only a bloodied corpse and an unnatural silence which hung over the clan cats until late into the night.

Negotiations

" WindClan patrol approaching! "
The warning yowl of Cloudtail rang out acrossthe clearing, arousing Firestar and Spottedleaf from their slumber. Since the events of the night before, Firestar had sought the comfort of his kits and mateand so had slept in the nursery. Now he crept slowly out of the den as Tallstar padded silently in.
"Tallstar," Firestar's voice conveyed neither too friendly a welcome nor did it show any hostility as he regarded the WindClan leader, "What brings you here?"
"I think it should be obvious, " Tallstar replied, "BloodClan has declared war on the clans and my cats aren't strong enough to hold them off. As much as I hate to admit it...WindClan needs ThunderClan aid."
As he scanned the WindClan cats present , Firestar couldn't help but agree with Tallstar. Many hard moons had rendered the once proud WindClan warriors down to little more than skinny wretches who's fur clung to their ribs. Yet their eyes burned with a grim determination as they marched out to meet the viscous, murderous legions of BloodClan.
" You should know Firestar ," Tallstar continued, "That WindClan will not be driven out our home again. We will face down BloodClan, with or without the backing of ThunderClan!"
Firestar shook his head, allowing himself a faint smile. "I admire your courage Tallstar and I would not forgive myself if I allowed you to face this threat alone. ThunderClan will stand alongside you in battle."
Although he had said WindClan would have fought either way, Firestar could see a faint flicker if hope in the old cat's eyes that betrayed the fact that Tallstar and his warriors would have been crushed like fleas before the mighty host of BloodClan and the malevolent Scourge.
"This is madness," yowled Ashpaw, "You saw what Scourge is capable of. What chance stand against a force like that?!"
" More than you think young one but only if we act now!" Parting to let him through, the WindClan warriors gave way to two others.

The first was a relatively large black and white tom who strode with an undeniable confidence despite being far out of his territory. The sight of the second tom, a small black cat with a dash of white on his chest and at the tip of his tail, caused Firestar and Spottedleaf to smile as they recognised their old friend Ravenpaw.
Barley halted in front of Firestar. "I heard from a patrol what transgressed at the gather and I say this to you now: BloodClan is strong but I doubt that even Scourge wishes to face the combined forces of the clan cats. "
"So if we unite the clans," Firestar continued, "We may have a chance!"
" Precisely," replied Barley,"Firestar I know you are the one cat who has the chance of uniting the clans. I am not proud to admit it but I was once a cat of BloodClan. Life in Twolegplace is harsh and cats go hungry. I just couldn't bear it any longer."
Briefly Firestar glanced at Spottedleaf, both cats equally surprised that a tom as noble as Barley could have once been a viscious rogue of BloodClan. However he quickly turned back to Barley so as not to offend the loner.
"You are right, " he nodded, "If we are to defeat this new threat, the clans must band together. Tallstar come with me, we'll have more luck convincing Leopardstar if there are more than one leader trying to convince her. You too Barely."
"Understood" nodded Tallstar flicking his tail to signal his warriors to depart.
Turning to his own warriors, Firestar chose Spottedleaf, Brightheart, Stonefur, Mistyfoot and Whitestorm to join him so that the patrol would contain three key cats of ThunderClan without being large enough to be threatening to TigerClan and also containing former RiverClan warriors.
One last glance for affirmation from Tallstar and Barley , Firestar flicked his tail and the cats ran into the undergrowth.
Remaining light on their feet as they powered through the foliage, Firestar noticed that even the WindClan cats, who were not suited for such dense flora were able to brush obstacles as though they nothing, a grim determination burning in their eyes. The fate of the forest was in their paws and they would not be stopped by mere plant life.
Only once they had reached the river border did the patrol hold position and then only for a second as they awaited the arrival of a

TigerClan patrol. They didn't have to wait long as soon a tattered patrol stumbled into view. Raising their hackles, the patrol carefully approached the border. Their lead wrong, Blackfoot took a step forward.
"Stay off our territory, " he hissed, "Or BloodClan will be the least of your worries. "
"We need to talk to Leopardstar," stated Firestar calmly, no matter how irksome he found the TigerClan deputy, he had to remain calm if there was to be any hope of an alliance. " It could benefit us all if she would listen."
For a while Blackfoot said nothing and it seemed that for a few dreadful moments that he would turn them back.
"Very well," he growled," But put so much as one foot out of place you're crow food."
Dipping their heads in understanding, the warriors of both ThunderClan and WindClan leapt across the stepping stones and onto TigerClan territory.
Immediately they found themselves being flanked by Blackfoot and his warriors before being practically herded towards the TigerClan camp. Instinctively, Firestar pressed closer to Spottedleaf at the thought of being on a possibly hostile clan's territory.
As they parted through some reeds, Firestar was welcomed by the sight of the TigerClan camp. Immediately he could smell the tension that hung over the encampment like a malevolent fog. Gathered on the left side of the camp, the cats of RiverClan huddled together while shooting evil glances over at the ShadowClan warriors who camped on the other side of the clearing. There were even two separate freshkill piles. Even as they entered the clearing, the ShadowClan and RiverClan warriors broke apart and padded over to their respective companies. Only Blackfoot remained with the patrol as they padded towards Leopardstar on the RiverClan side of the camp. Judging from the way the white warrior's muscles visibly tensed, Firestar concluded that there has been an internal conflict within TigerClan. Upon quietly voicing his thoughts to Spottedleaf, his mate gave him instant relief to the quandary that had entered the ginger tom's mind.
"Isn't it obvious, " she replied in a gentle if slightly teasing and playful way, "These clans only came together because they either respected Tigerstar's might or because they feared his wrath. Since Tigerstar's death at the claws of Scourge, there is little to stop the

clans breaking apart. "
Nodding slightly in agreement, Firestar was still amazed that things would deteriorate this rapidly and all it had taken was a sole swipe of Scourge's fearsome claws.
Presently however, the leader's attention was drawn back towards Blackfoot as the deputy padded towards him with Leopardstar. Around him, he TigerClan cats began to gather as their curiosity began to take hold but even they remained segregated.
" Speak your business," meowed Leopardstar tartly, "You should not be on TigerClan territory."
"You are right, , we should not, " Firestar replied choosing his words very carefully so as not to antagonise her, "But every clan faces a common threat on BloodClan."
"Is that what you are looking to waste my time about, " snorted Leopardstar, "I already have a solution to that problem."
Firestar and Tallstar briefly exchanged a puzzled glance before Tallstar voiced both of their concerns.
" How can you have figured ot a way to defeat BloodClan?"
" Defeat them? Are you mad?!" Leopardstar yowled, "There can be no way we can win against such a force. If BloodClan wants the forest, I say we let Scourge have it and move into the relative safety of Twolegplace.
Utter disbelief flowed through Firestar Surely Leopardstar wasn't serious. She couldn't be. But the look in her eyes told him otherwise.. Glancing around him, the leader of ThunderClan found that not only his own warriors, but many warriors of both RiverClan and ShadowClan looked as though they would rather stay and fight.
" Leopardstar, you are as much if a fool as Tigerstar was when he believed that he could control Scourge, " The harsh hiss came surprisingly from neither leader, warrior or loner but instead the dappled shape of Spottedleaf. Leopardstar's eyes widened as Spottedleaf took a furious step towards her to the astonishment of all gathered.
"Do you honestly believe Scourge will let you live in peace," she spat, "Fool! He will hunt you down and destroy you no matter where hide! Unless you join him, you are against him and without the support of the other clans, you shall be extinguished like a spark in a black whirlwind of hatred and violence!"
Panting, Spottedleaf backed away slightly and allowed her fur to

lie flat along her back as Leopardstar, along with many others, was left at a loss for words. However Blackfoot was not.
"How dare you speak to a leader like that?" he hissed looking as though only the presence of a cadre of ThunderClan and WindClan warriors prevented him from lashing out at Spottedleaf. "You have no more place in this forest than Scourge. You gave up our way of life when you took that kittypet as a mate!"
Ears dropping, Spottedleaf gazed at the ground. By nature, she was a strong cat but Blackfoot had perhaps hit one of the few areas that could truly touch her.
Firestar growled and unsheathed his claws as he wove his way around to block Spottedleaf from Blackfoot. The deputy could call him "kittypet" all he wanted but if the white tom did anything else to harm Spottedleaf, claws and fur would go flying."
'Enough!" yowled Barley before the situation could escalate further. "Spottedleaf is perhaps wiser and more honourable than most if not all cats here. You face a foe that knows no honour or mercy. Scourge was hunt you down to the last kit in order to get what he wants. He doesn't believe in StarClan nor the warrior code and as such, it is his greatest strength for nothing can restrain him. But if you join forces now, before it is too late, we can turn it into his greatest weakness."
Briefly Firestar wondered how Scourge's greatest strength could ever be his greatest weakness. Just then Leopardstar padded back forth.
" I can't believe that I'm saying this," she sighed to Blackfoot, "But Spottedleaf and the loner are right. " She the turned to Firestar, "TigerClan will aid you in the battle against Scourge of BloodClan."
Firestar shook his head in respinse. "No. If the clans are to fight, there must be four and not three. You can't try to deny that TigerClan is divided; it must become RiverClan and ShadowClan once more."
Leopardstar said nothing as the thought of losing half of her warriors washed over her. But once glance at the two very different bands of TigerClan warriors told her that Firestar was right.
"Very well," she nodded,"I hereby dissolve TigerClan and appoint Stonefur back as deputy of RiverClan while Blackfoot shall leader ShadowClan."
Somewhat mollified, Blackfoot dipped his head in gratitude to Leopardstar before turning to face the other leaders.

"Tomorrow I shall travel to the moonstone. None shall find ShadowClan wanting in the line of combat, which is more than can be said for some cats."
"What do you mean?" Enquired Tallstar.
Blackfoot snorted in disgust. " Darkstripe abandoned us the moment Tigerstar died."
Looking around, neither Firestar nor Spottedleaf could see any sign of the dark traitor. Perhaps it was for the best. With Darkstripe gone, there was less of a chance of TigerClan reforming under Tigerstar's old followers.
However not everyone was content.
"I reject the deputyship of RiverClan," hissed Stonefur. When everyone looked at him puzzled, none more so than Mistyfoot and Leopardstar, he continued, "While I accept the offer to rejoin RiverClan, I can never forgive what you did to me and the other half clan cats Leopardstar, despite our many moons of loyalty and service! Truly you do not deserve us as your warrior but if you are to make any cay deputy, it should be Mistyfoot. If not for her, we should have not survived long enough to be rescued by Firestar."
Eyes wide, Mistyfoot tried to convince her brother to retake the position but Stonefur refused to yield and with Leopardstar's consent, she finally accepted. Firestar smiled briefly as he recognised some of Bluestar's stubbornness in her son.
Padding over, Leopardstar dipped her head grimly to the leader of ThunderClan and whispered.
"Well done, you have managed to unite the clans for the battle against Scourge," she hissed under her breath."Let's just pray to StarClan that it isn't our last."

Moonlit meander

Rushing by like water running down a mountain side trickling away into the black nothingness of the eternal void, the days passed faster than any would have hoped. Casting darting glances every flicker of movemehadow as though any one could be harbouring a BloodClan rogue or their malevolent tyrant, the warriors waited out the days by training themselves and their apprentices. Seldom would a cat leave their camp alone for fear that Scourge would go back on his word as he had with Tigerstar and ambush them before the day of reckoning.
With many casualties to be expected, Spottedleaf had torn herself from the oblivious comfort of the nursery in order to aid in the preparations for the upcoming battle. Cobweb bandages were woven, herbs stored and poultrices prepared.
"But will it be enough?" Spottedleaf found herself wondering aloud. Never had she seen or heard of such a threat to the Clans, not even one hinted at in the ancient legends. Scourge was beyond lethal. Did he even mark the end times?
" It will have to be enough," Cinderpelt sighed next to her, the grey she cat's voice and mannerisms were both weary and almost distant as though she sought solace to an internal conflict as well as the external one.
"Have StarClan sent you a sign? " Spottedleaf asked, resting her tail upon her old friend's shoulder.
"No," Cinderpelt shook her head glumly, "They sent no warning to me of Scourge. Or of BloodClan."
"Neither have they sent me a sign,' Spottedleaf sighed, "Perhaps they had no way of knowing themselves."
Cinderpelt nodded for a moment before regarding Spottedleaf oddly as though there was something weighing heavily on her mind but she had not either the tact or courage to say it. Seeing this Spottedleaf looked comfortingly at her friend.
" Yes?"
Cinderpelt exhaled lightly before whispering. " How can we or anyone else stop Scourge? You saw what he did to Tigerstar! "
Taken aback for a moment, Spottedleaf allowed Cinderpelt's

anxiety to wash through her for a brief moment. Never had a warrior been able to strip a leader of more than a single life. Scourge had and further more had done so with but one strike. The cold look in his eye chilled Spottedleaf to the bone. There was no anger and ambition in them as there had been in Tigerstar's. Spottedleaf would have been able to understand that. But no. Behind Scourge's eyes she could only see the calculating ruthlessness of a pure killer.

" I don't know," she mewed at last, "But we will try and we will succeed. Scourge maybe a skilled warrior but so is Firestar."

"You're right," Cinderpelt nodded, "Scourge won't know what hit him when he faces Firestar." Although there was still hint of something which Spottedleaf thought she recognised in her tone, Cinderpelt's resolve was steered to aid her clan.

" Hey get back here you three!"

No sooner than had they heard Firestar's yowl, then did three ball of fur tumble into the medicine den. Seeking to detailed themselves from one another, Squirrelkit, Leafkit and Finchkit looked up apologetically at Cinderpelt and their mother.

"Why aren't you three in the nursery?" Demanded Spottedleaf as she lifted Squirrelkit up off of Finchkit who had been stuck under her larger siblings.

"Sorry mama," mewed Finchkit as Spottedleaf gently set her down, "We just wanted to explore."

Just then, Firestar poked his head into the den and sighed with relief.

" Oh thank StarClan that they are here," he panted, "I was talking to Goldenflower and the other queens in regards to their preparations for the battle when these three slipped out. I've been chasing them all around camp."

Turning towards her kits, Spottedleaf found that while Squirrelkit and Finchkit batted playfully at each other's ears, Leafkit was more interested in the various herbs that lay scattered around the den. Sniffing the aromatic aroma of the herbs, the kit's otherwise unstable legs into Cinderpelt's soft fur.

"You can't blame them for being curious," Cinderpelt chuckled gently giving the tiny kit an affectionate behind the ear. " Kits are always too adventurous for their own good. As are some grown warriors," she finished pointedly at Firestar although Spottedleaf it was all done in good jest.

"Well um.., however that may be," Firestar stuttered embarassed for a second before regaining his voice. " It doesn't excuse them from disobeying their parents. Now come in you three, you need your rest, I need to talk to your mother."
Before the kits could protest, Cinderpelt steppes forth wrapping her tail around Leafkit. " If you want Firestar, I could watch these three while you two go out for a bit. I'll put them back in the nursery and keep them out of trouble."
"Oh can we please?" Begged the kits perking up immediately, "Please?"
"Oh alright," Spottedleaf smiled lightly licking Squirrelkit across the muzzle, knowing her kits would be safe with Cinderpelt. "I don't see why not if you're well behaved."
" Thanks Cinderpelt," mouthed Firestar smiling at his kits before beckoning for Spottedleaf to follow him. Taking one last look at her kits and seeing Cinderpelt nod warmly at her, Spottedleaf slipped out of the den.
The camp was alive with activity. As they padded through the gorse tunnel marking the entrance to the camp, Firestar and Spottedleaf noted Cloudtail and Brightheart teaching the young apprentices some more advanced combat moves while also aiding each other's technique. Sandstorm nodded to each of them as they passed her in the tunnel on her return from a late hunting patrol with Dustpelt and Greystripe. Whitestorm sat on guard but said nothing as the two lovers slipped passed him, his eyes focused on the horizon as though something in the distance troubled his mind.
Starlight shimmering down upon them, the lovers padded alongside each other, brushing their pelts as they walked deeper into the forest. Creating an orchestra, the sounds of the nocturnal animals filled their ears as Firestar led Spottedleaf along until he finally stopped behind some bushes.
"So what's this all about?" Spottedleaf mewed after realising that neither of them had spoken since leaving the camp.
"Well I thought that since this might be our last night together..." Firestar began calmly.
"Don't say such a thing!" Spottedleaf gasped in shock, "Of course it won't be."
Firestar smiled warmly and held up his tail to politely silence her. " But if it is, but I wanted this night to be special. And what better place to spend it than here?"

Brushing aside the foliage with his paw, Firestar revealed a hollow lined with marigolds, the sweet scent of the flowers forming an intoxicating sweetness that filled the very air. Awestruck, Spottedleaf stepped forth slowly into the hollow as she instantly recognised it. It was the place she and Firestar had declared their love for each other in.
She then jolted slightly as she felt something brush her ear. Turning, she just managed to see Firestar smiling as he placed a single flower behind her left ear. He then licked her daintily across her face.
Blushing Spottedleaf returned the affectionate action before sitting down alongside him. Briefly they stared into eyes.
"Spottedleaf," Firestar purred as he whispered into her ear, "You have made the happiest tom possible. You have always been there to support me especially during hard times and have gifted me with a wonderful family. I don't think I can ever repay you enough."
Spottedleaf smiled warmly and nuzzled I to her chest fur and closed her eyes . "You don't have to." She purred. "The day Bluestar brought you into ThunderClan was the second best in my life."
"Only the second," Firestar mewed, playfully mimicking a surprised tone, "What was the first then?"
"Becoming your mate," she purred nuzzling his fur as they watched the stars together. Undisturbed he two sat in the serene silence as the stars watched them from above, their heavenly light bathing the couple's pelts with an angelic glow. Only when the night began to grow old did they return silently back to camp, where they curled up together in their nest with their kits snuggling against the warmth of their parent's fur.

The Storm breaks

An icy wind blew in from the north, chilling the waiting ThunderClan warriors as it moaned like a lost soul. Silently they sat waiting; waiting for the dreaded sight of BloodClan and it's tyrannical leader.
Alongside the ThunderClan cats stood the other clans. WindClan, standing close to their allies, stood like the claw of the clans, seemingly frail but quick and deadly when they lashed out. Although at first glance fragile, the cats of WindClan were a force to be reckoned with, a life on the moorland toughening both their bodies and mind.
RiverClan stood not far off. The scent of trepidation hung heavily over the cats and not without good reason. These warriors had been forced to fight away from the safety of their riverside home to a place in which their skills counted for little. But still they stood there, bloodied by Tigerstar and seeking to unleash their terrible rage up in the terror which he had inadvertently unleashed upon them all.
Finally stood ShadowClan. Under the command of the newly anointed Blackstar, the stoic warriors sharpened their claws on the coarse stone beneath their paw. Gazing out across the forest, the warriors of the dark clan held only a resolve as steely and unforgiving as the landscape which had forged them. These cats expected no quarter and would offer none.
Darkening the sky, grey clouds began to form overhead as the wind continues to wail. No sound dared to interupt it as it seemed that the very forest held its breath in anticipation for the battle to come for the blood to be spilt. Instead the wind kept blowing its mournful tune.
Sitting at the forefront of the ThunderClan warriors, Firestar cast his mind back to the camp. Were Spottedleaf, Cinderpelt and the others evacuating? Was his family safe? What if they couldn't hold? What if Scourge slaughtered them all, their sacrifice meaning nothing as the dark tom killed their families? No. He would not, could not let that happen!"
Then everything fell deathly silent. Slinking out of the dense

undergrowth came the host of BloodClan, an army of sadistic killers at the front of which strode their insidious lord. Scourge's tooth studded collar, a testament to his prowess in the savage arts of war, drawing the attention of every clan cat present. How many grisly trophies would Scourge add to his grim tally before the battle's end? For a while the two sides waited, studying, probing each other for any sign of weakness. Claws unsheathed to scrape the unfeeling rocks and we dared wildy as the tension thickened to an almost intoxicating effect.

Then Scourge began to strode forth. Alone. This was the final chance for negotiations and a peaceful solution to the conflict.

" You go Firestar." The ginger tom was startled at the voice of Tallstar behind him. As Firestar turned, he was greeted by the sight of the three leaders of WindClan, RiverClan and ShadowClan.

" Why me?" Firestar asked, staring in disbelief at the warriors before him.

"Firestar," said Leopardstar briskly, "You have a way of dealing with problems that will most likely lead to a bloodless conflict. But if the negotiations fail, you have proven yourself in battle and we would be proud to stand beside you."

Seeing the reserved look in Leopardstar and Blackstar's faces, Firestar wondered briefly in they truly meant it or were merely saying it as they had no other choice. But in the end, it didn't matter.

"I'll do it " he nodded, determination spreading across his features. Looking g one last time at the clans he had come to come home, Firestar turned and padded out towards Scourge.

Dipping their heads respectfully to one another as Firestar approached, the two leaders maintained a wary distance. Fighting to keep the hair on his back to lie flat, Firestar was faced with the ebony killer of Tigerstar. Despite the fact that he easily dwarfed Scourge, Firestar was in no way foolish enough to believe that Scourge was not capable of collateral damage if he willed it.

" So," said Scourge in a voice as eerily calm as undisturbed lake in the night, with no way of telling of what truly lay beneath, "Have you considered my ultimatum?"

"Yes," replied Firestar, hoping he sounded far more confident than he felt, "We will not leave but we are prepared to offer a compromise."

"Oh really," Scourge sneered in the same smooth tone but this time

allowing his fangs to show every so slightly, "I was unaware that you were in a position to argue. However I am a more reasonable cat than you may think. Indulge me."
Firestar breathed in before speaking in as commanding a tone as he could muster, speaking with every fibre of his being. "We will let you return to BloodClan territory in peace. There will be no retribution. There does not need blood to be spilt this day."
"You'll let me return," Scourge snarled, his teeth now fully bared in anger, "Let's get one thing clear forest scum! You are in no position to be making deals. If you won't leave the forest willingly, then I'll force you out. Surely you're not deluded enough to think I can't!"
Firestar unsheathed his claws. "Even so, we will fight you at every turn Scourge. We will fight for every blood soaked pawstep of our territory rather than surrender to your madness!"
Scourge then laughed manically but the sound held as much warmth as his icy eyes. Twisting his face into a sort of evil grin, Scourge padded forth until he was practically speaking into the ginger tom's ear. " My dear Firestar, that's just makes it all the fun."
Firestar's eyes widened in fear as the relish too struck him that Scourge would make good on his promise. If he wasn't stopped here and now, the black tom would carve a bloody path through the forest.
"Gather your warriors for their final battle," Scourge breathed before turning and padding back towards his warriors. Sprinting back towards the clan cats, Firestar tried to prepare himself.
"Ready yourselves," he called as he joined ranks with ThunderClan once more. Across the clearing, the warriors tensed as Scourge prepared his forces, muttering a quick word to Bone before turning to face his adversaries.
" BloodClan attack!!!" He yelled. Yowling for blood, the ferocious warriors of BloodClan charged, hurtling towards the forest clans. Claws gleamed amd teeth studded collars rattled slightly as the horde came crashing onwards.
"On your order," Whitestorm breathed into Firestar's ear. For a single terrifying moment, Firestar stood still, simply watching as the BloodClan warriors charged. Then it happened.
" Forest clans attack!!!!" He yowled at the top of his voice, his legs carrying him forth even before he had finished issuing his order. Letting loose a cater wail of yowls, screeches and hisses, the entirety of the forest cats harmed forth. Wind streaking through

their pelts, the warrior cats met the BloodClan rogues.
Bodys crashed to the ground as cats fell upon each in a fury of claws, teeth and blood lust. Hissing at a muscular tabby tom, Firestar narrowly evaded a torn ear as the tom's claws whistled past his head. Bunching his muscles, Firestar leapt at the the rogue, sinking his fangs into his chest, tearing tufts of fur and blood. Spitting as he tried to struggle free, the tom attempted a swipe with a free claw, only to repaid for his efforts by a savage bite to the chest by Firestar. Firestar, knowing that his opponent was beaten, leapt off the tom, allowing the creature to scuttle away back to it foul hole to lick its wound. Immersed in the swirling vortex of brutal melee combat around him.
Not far off Sandstorm fought alongside two warriors, the scent of battle making it nearly impossible to distinguish individual clans although Firestar easily recognised his old friends Ravenpaw and Onewhisker of WindClan. Greystripe swiped at a tortoiseshell she cat while simultaneously dancing out of the way of he retaliation.
Not far off, Tallstar fought at the head of an elite cadre of his finest warriors, spearheaded by the hulking shape of Mudclaw. Fighting back to back, Mistyfoot and Stonefur hissed as three grappled with three scrawnier BloodClan warriors while Whitestorm and Bone circled each other, the experienced skill of the ThunderClan deputy was now pitted against the brute strength of Scourge's familiar.
A yowl caught Firestar's attention and he turned to witness Cloudtail grappling with a larger warrior. Unable to disengage, Cloudtail struggled to break free as the mottled tom raised a paw, claws gleam g ready for the death blow. Appearing suddenly and yowling in anger, Brightheart charged into the flank of the BloodClan rogue, sending the tom flying as she helped Cloudtail unsteadily to his paws.
"Thanks Brightheart, " mewed Cloudtail softly.
"Save it for after the battle," Brightheart smiled, giving him a brief lick on the forehead before the two darted off into the thick of battle.
Caught unawares, Firestar was forced to the ground as a large she cat forced him to the ground. He could smell her foetid breath as he wriggled underneath her considerable weight. Suddenly a warm red liquid sprayed all over Firestar and the she cat fell, a jagged gash across her throat. Staggering to his paws, Firestar's gaze locked with

that of Darkstripe, the dark tabby's claws slickness with blood.
" Have you no sense of loyalty anymore?" Firestar snarled pointing to the limp body of the she cat.
"Loyalty needs to be earnt Firestar and no one here deserves mine, " snapped Darkstripe, "Now I live only to see you suffer!"
Lunging at his former leader, Darkstripe slashed at Firestar, drawing blood from the ginger tom's muzzle. A growl escaping his lips, Firestar sprung foward, clawing at the rogue's ear, tearing it in two. Hissing in pain, Darkstripe readied himself to strike again.
"Traitor!!!!!" A large grey shape barrelled into Darkstripe, clawing and biting viscously at the dark tabby. Trying desperately to fend off Greystripe's wrath, Darkstripe had inadvertently left himself undefended towards Firestar.
Locking his jaws into Darkstripe's throat with a vice like grip, Firestar felt the warm blood flow into her mouth. Shaking violently, Darkstripe fought to get out of Firestar's grip but he would not yield. Then Darkstripe went still. Blood still filling his mouth, Firestar allowed Darkstripe to fall lifelessly to the cold, hard ground.
" Such is the fate of traitors," spat Firestar looking up to Greystripe. Greystripe however was looking on horrified to a spectacle mot far away.
Following he friend's line of sight, Firestar yowled out in anger as he saw the bloodied figure of Bone standing over the limp body of Whitestorm. If however Bone had any chance to gloat over his victory, it did last long as with a cacophony of screeches, he was buried under a tide of apprentices. Mighty as he was, the battered and bloodied deputy was unable to fight off, Bramblepaw, Tawnypaw, Featherpaw and several others as the dragged him down, clawing and biting until the large rogue lay motionless in a pool of blood.
Rushing to the side of Whitestorm, Firestar and Greystripe looked down at their dying friend. Crimson blood matted his once snowy pelt and his eyes that used to glow with warm amber light, were now coldly dying out.
" Don't move Whitestorm, " mewed Greystripe, "We'll think of something."
"There is no need for that," rasped Whitestorm weakly, "I must go to hunt with StarClan now."
"No, Greystripe's right," Firestar choked at the thought of losing not

only his deputy but a close friend. " We just...."
"Don't worry about me," Whitestorm smiled weakly, "You've got a good deputy right here. Save our clan Firestar. They...need....you," His golden eyes closed over, he breathed one last time then Whitestorm finally expired.
" What do we do now? " mewed Greystripe.
"We fulfil his dying wishes," meowed Firestar padding over to the body of his fallen comrade. Fighting the pain and stress threatening to overwhelm him, Firestar gazed upward towards the clouded sky. " I say these words before StarClan and the body of Whitestorm so that he may hear and approve of my choice. Greystripe shall be the next deputy of ThunderClan."
What ThunderClan warriors close enough to hear the decree managed to chant Greystripe's name before returning to tie battle at hand.
"Firestar...I don't know what to..."
"I know Greystripe; " Firestar managed to smile, "But let's return to the task at paw. We need a way to route BloodClan before they overwhelm us."
High pitched screeches and yowls from the left suddenly caught Firestar's attention forcing him to divert his gaze. Striding through the chaos of combat, Scourge was fighting off several different warriors simultaneously and not only that, he was holding his own. Lashing out with a single swipe of his deadly claws, Scourge slit the throat of a large ShadowClan warrior. Even as the arterial fountain sprayed over its comrades and the body flopped lifelessly to the ground, Scourge kicked out with his hind claws, severing the tendons of the RiverClan cat unlucky enough to be within striking distance. Heedless to the cries of the pitiful creature, several cats trampled the fallen warrior, hurling themselves at the BloodClan leader in their desparation to bring him down. Utterly unfazed, Scourge continued to lash out repeatedly at each warrior, a black whirlwind of grim death as he reaped his bloody harvest.
Narrowing his eyes, Firestar now knew exactly what he had to do if this battle was to be won.
" Sever the head and the body will die," Firestar hissed to himself as he leapt into the fray. Charging through the thick of battle, Firestar barged aside any BloodClan cat that tried to impede his path. Leaping upon a rock, Firestar yowled out his challenge.
"Scourge, face me!"

His voice ringing out even above the clamour of battle, Firestar watched as Scourge whipped around to face him. For a moment, Firestar's emerald gaze met Scourge's icy glare.
" If it is a simple brawl you desire," Scourge hissed slinking towards the stone, claws unsheathed in anticipation, "Then I'll give you your last!"
" You'll not be found wanting for a challenge," Firestar growled leaping down from his perch.
" We'll see," smirked Scourge darkly before pouncing at Firestar. Barely having any time to get out of the way, Firestar yowled as he felt Scourge rake his flesh. Blood welling up across his shoulder, Firestar slashed at Scourge with his claws. Only managing to scrape his hind leg as Scourge nimbly evaded, Firestar was forced to admit that the small tom's speed and agility was just as impressive as his arsenal.
Leaping back as Scourge attempted to bite his keg and disable him, Firestar struck out, scratching Scourge deep across the nose. As Scourge withdrew hissing, Firestar bunched his muscles and sprang upon him. Using his greater weight to knock Scourge to the ground, Firestar hissed and began to claw repeatedly at his adversary's face.
" Give in Scourge?" He growled.
" Never," snarled Scourge. Before Firestar knew what was happening, Scourge lashed out with his front paw. Striking the ThunderClan on the head with the devastating blow, Scourge knocked Firestar off of him.
Struggling to stay conscious, Firestar tried to scramble to his feet. But he couldn't. As he vision began to blacken, he watched as Scourge raised a paw, claws gleaming, as he aimed for his head. Through his rapidly fading vision, Firestar thought he heard a cry of retreat from the clan cats seconds before the paw descended and everything went black.

Hold the line

Yowling and hissing, the warrior clans bolted through the narrow gorse tunnel that marked the entrance to the ThunderClan camp. Scrabbling frantically through, smaller apprentices and wounded warriors crawled through the thorn stricken tunnel while those with fight remain within them guarded the rear in a desperate attempt to stem the bloodthirsty tide of BloodClan.
Spottedleaf gently herded the wounded cats towards the nursery where there was room for Cinderpelt to treat them. Over the gorse barrier, she could hear the frantic sounds of warriors clashing with rogues. Trying in vain to ignore it, the tortoiseshell kept her eyes open for a flash of orange fur amongst those filtering into the camp from the tunnel. Where was Firestar?
The stench of blood filled the air as Spottedleaf watched her clanmates filter in. Dustpelt was heavily scratched and was being propped up against Fernpaw. Brightheart rushed in followed by Cloudtail who was backing his way behind her through the tunnel, hissing at some unseen assailants before joining Brightheart. Tallstar escorted by Onewhisker and Mudclaw burst through before racing off to join those of WindClan who had made it to the camp.
"Greystripe what's happening out there?!" Spottedleaf mewed trying to remain calm although the panic was evident on her face as the tom and Sandstorm pulled themselves through the gorse barrier.
"BloodClan had too many," Greystripe winced as Spottedleaf immediately put a cobweb on a particularly nasty cut above his forehead, "We couldn't hold them off. Those of us that didn't make it here scattered towards ShadowClan and RiverClan territory and will try to form up later. Why haven't you and the others evacuated yet?"
Spottedleaf sighed and began working on Sandstorm's wounds. "Dappletail and the other elders refused to move and we needed more time to gather the necessary herbs and get the queens to leave. I'm at my wits end. Tell me where Firestar is, need to speak to him."
Greystripe and Sandstorm suddenly went pale and exchanged a

nervous glance between them as though neither wanted to say exactly what they were both thinking. Eyes filled with sorrow, Sandstorm padded beside Spottedleaf, resting her tail gently upon her.
" I think you might want to sit down for this," she mewed softly. Cold dread began to sink like lead in Spottedleaf's stomach as she felt Sandstorm's tail gently guide her down. " W-What do you mean?" She stuttered nervously,"W-where is Firestar?"
"He fell." Greystripe choked bowing his head in his grief.
"What? But he still has eight more lives," Spottedleaf mewed quietly, tears welling up in her eyes, "He'll be back...right?"
"He died fighting Scourge," Sandstorm sighed sadly, "I'm not sure if he can come back."
If Spottedleaf heard these words, she gave no sign. Let a out a pathetic, mournful wail as the intense grief came over her, Spottedleaf collapsed on the cold ground, the sounds of battle deaf to her ears. What should she do now? Could she go on? She had to, it was what he would have wanted after all.
"Spottedleaf can you hear me?" Spottedleaf snapped back to reality to see Greystripe looking at her worriedly.
" Yeah," she mewed wiping away a tear with her paw.
" The barrier won't hold for much longer," Greystripe meowed grimly, "You need to gather Cinderpelt and the kits and get to safety. Head for WindClan territory!"
"I can provide an escort," said Tallstar, "My warriors will know the quickest way."
"Understood," Spottedleaf nodded bundling up what herbs she could be fore racing to the nursery.
Cramped within the den, Cinderpelt was frantically applying whatever care she could to those wounded. On her way in, Spottedleaf passed Dustpelt, the tabby's shoulder bleeding heavily but only wrapped in the most basic of bandages. Under any other circumstance, Spottedleaf would have ordered Dustpelt to stand down and rest but at the present, they could afford no such luxury.
Smelling their mother, Squirrelkit, Leafkit and Finchkit immediately bounded over before burying their faces in their mother's fur, terrified out of their minds.
"Mama what going on?" Squeaked Leafkit closing her eyes shaking.
"Yes what is going on?" Cinderpelt mewed quietly padding over.
Recognising the flicker or pain inside her friend's eyes, Cinderpelt

rested her tail gently on Spottedleaf's flank, "Is everything okay?"
"We need to get out now," Spottedleaf mewed, pushing her grief aside for a moment as much as it pained her to do so, "The clans will buy us what time they can."
"Got it," Cinderpelt nodded determinedly, picking up the bundle of herbs that she had ready, "But where are we headed? Surely there can't be anywhere safe within the territory?"
"WindClan camp," Spottedleaf could have cried out in relief at the sight of Ravenpaw followed by Onewhisker. The small black tom stepped forward, "We'll escort you there as safely as we can."
"Thank StarClan," Spottedleaf mewed, "But we don't have much time before...."
The cats then froze as they heard Greystripe's warning yowl echo through the clearing.
"BloodClan have broken through!"

Smirking as he watched his war host pile in through the pitiful defences that the forest cats had erected, Scourge leapt into the heart of combat. Lashing out with lightning fast speed and precision, Scourge sent a skinny she cat scarpering for cover with a heavily torn ear.
No sooner than had he seen her off than was Scourge faced with two more warriors. Seeking to encircle him, the warriors leapt at him simultaneously, catching Scourge's pelt with their sharp claws. Despite himself, Scourge had to admire the ferocity in which the clan cats were fighting, matching if not exceeding that of his own warriors. Ducking to avoid a carefully aimed blow to the ear, Scourge surged upwards, catching the cat's throat with his upper cut and causing severe bleeding.Before the other could intervene, the black tom tore gouged viscious marks across his muzzle, sending him reeling back.
As the warrior stumbled away, Scourge suddenly caught a glimpse of a small party of cats, two toms, two she cats and some kits, skirting the edge of battle heading for a cleverly concealed hole in the gorse barrier.
"You won't escape me forest scum," he hissed charging towards them through the thick of melee. Realising what he had locked on too, a white furred tom launched himself at Scourge. Snorting at his impudence, Scourge easily evaded the white warrior's flurry of blows before swatting him aside with one powerful blow.

"Cloudtail!" Scourge heard a she cat yowl as the white warrior crawled away to safety. Scourge paid no heed but instead raced after the fleeing case, diving through the tunnel, after them.

Panting through a mouthful of Squirrelkit's fur, Spottedleaf padded alongside Cinderpelt as the refugees headed for the sanctuary of the WindClan border. The poor medicine cat was going as fast as she could but her crippled leg was forcing the patrol to travel at a slower pace, despite Cinderpelt's protest otherwise.
"Just go on without me," Cinderpelt insisted as she limped alongside, "I'll be fine."
" Not on your life," Spottedleaf mewed through Squirrelkit's fur, "We're not leaving you...."
Spottedleaf's ears prickled suddenly as she hears the sound of fast approaching paws and she could see the bushes behind them rustling.Gripping her kit's fur tightly, Spottedleaf braced herself as she watched a small black tom leap out of the undergrowth. An uncharacteristically cold spike of anger pierced Spottedleaf's heart. She knew this tom.
"Scourge! Get back!" Ravenpaw growled handing Finchkit to Cinderpelt, "Onewhisker, get the others to safety. I'll hold off Scourge."
You can try," Scourge sneered as he and Ravenpaw leapt at each, hissing and clawing, At each other savagely. Spottedleaf watched mesmerised by the combatant's quick darting movements as Ravenpaw dueled the dark tom. She was suddenly brought back to reality as Onewhisker hurriedly nudged her side.
"We need to go now!" He urged.
Nodding, the others grabbed the kits and sprinted away from the sounds of battle. No sooner than had they taken a few steps, did Spottedleaf look back, horrified at what she saw. Despite his noble efforts to buy time, it was clearly evident that Ravenpaw was merely being toyed with by Scourge. Already bleeding for a dozen deep cuts and tiring quickly, Ravenpaw swiped at Scourge, who had yet to sustain an injury. Ravenpaw wouldn't last much longer.
"I'm going back to help him" she declared.
"You can't be serious," Onewhisker protested, "You can't fight Scourge. Ravenpaw made his choice."
"And I'm making mine," Spottedleaf stated handing Squirrelkit to Onewhisker,"Just get my kits and Cinderpelt to safety."

Not even looking back to see if Onewhisker had obeyed, Spottedleaf raced off towards the duelists. Before she could reach them, Spottedleaf saw Ravenpaw take a heavily blow to the head and was rendered immobile while Scourge raised his paw for the killing blow.
" Back away from him!" Spottedleaf screeched leaping at Scourge full force. Caught off guard, Scourge was thrown off of Ravenpaw only to skid to a stop.
"You'll pay for that," he hissed circling Spottedleaf menacingly, "Mind you, you look familiar."
"Perhaps you remembered since you killed my mate," Spottedleaf hissed, only to have to dodge as Scourge lunged at her. The ton was small but by StarClan he was fast.
" Ah yes, now I remember," he sneered, "You're that Firestar's mate. Take pride in the fact that he provided me a worthy challenge unlike this runt." He flicked his tail at Ravenpaw.
Angered, Spottedleaf lashed out at Scourge, catching him across the muzzle. Wincing in agony, Scourge hissed and lashed out with a series of rapid strikes, scratching Spottedleaf several times.
Casting her thoughts back to when she was a warrior's apprentice, Spottedleaf pulled back memories of moves once she thought long forgotten. She had to time it perfectly. Dodging one swipe, Spottedleaf swung around and in one fluid movement, clawed Scourge's shoulder, staggering the black tom.
" Not bad," panted Scourge.
"I wasn't looking for your approval," hissed Spottedleaf. But Scourge was far from out of the fight. Darting forth with insane speed, Scourge pounced on Spottedleaf, digging his claws into her flank as his momentum brought them crashing down.
"But not good enough," he spat on her ear. Winded and unable to move under the tom, Spottedleaf closed her eyes and thought of everything she would be leaving behind, her friends, her kits, her love. Swallowing, she awaited Scourge's final heavy blow to her throat.
"Firestar," she breathed, "I'm so sorry."

The Eternal dark

Firestar was falling, endlessly falling in what he perceived to be a limitless black void that had consumed his entire body and it's surroundings like some great beast that would not be sated until it had glutted upon all of time and existence. He felt nothing bar a faint buzzing in the back of his head, an annoyance that continued to persist despite his efforts to suppress it.
How long had he been floating like this? Seconds or perhaps years? Maybe the battle was still raging or perhaps the clans he had fought so hard to protect were long gone, little more than dust on the uncaring winds of time? Firestar couldn't say.
Growing slowly in volume, the buzzing began to overwhelm the tom's mind, like a rat that constantly gnaws at the bones of an ox, slow to start then becoming greater in severity. Unable to rid himself of the sound, Firestar instead cast his mind back to those lost to him in a desperate attempt to ignore the sound. Instantly pictures of a melancholy sweetness filled him as he remembered the day the kits had been born. The soft rustle of hay as he lay beside Spottedleaf as the kits crawled blindly towards their mother to nurse. Firestar could almost smell Spottedleaf's sweet scent as she twirled around him in that eventful night in the clearing of marigolds. He could still see her kind amber gaze upon him as he padded nervously into camp for the first time as little more than a naive kittypet all thoseany moons ago. Then they were gone. Consumed by the never ending darkness .
"I failed them," he muttered, his voice seeming unnervingly loud in the echoing stillness.
"You did not fail them Firestar," The female's voice was soft and yet with an undeniable authority, "And neither shall you fail them."
"Bluestar? " But instead of the figure of his mentor, as Firestar turned around, he was confronted by a mere spark, growing slowly at first then faster and faster until it exploded. A myriad of colours painted itself upon the black canvas in front of Firestar's very eyes. It was as though every clan cat that had ever lived was rushing by him in a vast blur of tabby and tortoiseshell, their eyes flashing a multitude of hues as they circled him, scents swirling like a vortex

over the lone tom.
Standing at the forefront of the fallen warriors stood one. His fur was a faded orange and his frame muscular amd young as though he had been in his prime at the time of his demise. But most impressive were his eyes. Glowing like an emerald light which radiated across the ebony void. It was a presence both humbling and eerie at once.
"The eyes are the gateway to the soul, " Bluestar mewed, appearing beside Firestar as though from thin air, taking the young leader by surprise, "As you may have guessed, this particular cat has an extremely unique and powerful soul. Tell me young Firestar, do you know who this cat is?"
For a while, Firestar studied the cat before him. He seemed familiar and yet...so unknown. He had never met this tom or at least as far as his knowledge went. The developed muscles that rippled underneath his faded ginger fur distinguishedhim as a warrior and yet those eyes and the calm, inviting stance that he took was welcoming and have no indication of any hostility. Allowing a small smile to spread itself across his face, Firestar soon understood.
"Well?" The mirth in Bluestar's tone indicated that she too enjoyed this little game of the StarClan cats.
"Its me, isn't it?"
"Very astute Firestar," Bluestar smiled before padding over to the warrior opposite Firestar. At her feather like touch, the spirit flickered slightly but the eyes stayed the same powerful beacons as they had always been.
" When a leader loses a life, that life comes here to await the rest of him or her," Bluestar continued pointing at the spirit and then back at Firestar, "Every leader goes through it however this is only you Firestar are.....special. "
The tom's ears perked up slightly in interest. "Special?"
"Yes special," Bluestar echoed padded slowly around the circle of warriors from days past, "Your soul is...enigmatic. For some reason it posesses a quality that allows it to install hope in others. Hope which shall spread like burning flames among a dry fire, leaping from branch to branch with little difficulty until the heart and soul of every cat on the forest is ablaze with it."
The old she cat then padded over and lowered her face so that her sapphire orbs met Firestar's emerald gaze.
"You did not think I gave you your name purely because of the

colour of your pelt?"
For a while, Firestar sat once again in silence as he let the words wash over him until he found the strength to speak again.
"But what hope can I provide them now? I am dead."
"And there in lies the beauty of it," chuckled Bluestar, "It is not yet your time to pass from the mortal world."
Firestar nodded but his mind was a whir with questions. How would he get back? Would his physical body be forever weakened by the traumatic experience? Could he face Scourge again? Smiling, Bluestar looked at him as though she could see his thoughts as clearly as if he had spoken them.
" Do not worry," she meowed, "The forest beloved to all of us at one point and we shall not abandon it I it's time of need. Nor shall we abandon you."
Casting a look over his shoulder, Firestar gasped at tie sight that greater him. A vast legion of mighty warriors stood, claws unsheathed as their pelts blew in the wind and a grim determination burned in their eyes. Firestar blinked and then turned back to Bluestar, a pulsating energy flaring in his chest.
"I'm ready."
"The warriors of StarClan will march and give you strength," nodded the blue grey she cat. Gently she leaned forth and touched noses with Firestar.
Immediately Firestar felt energy akin to a thousand novas coursing through his veins as the cats begin to bolt and swirl around him, creating the vast ever changing mosaic of tan, black and white before being swallowed once more by the all consuming blackness.
A feeling of total weightlessness once again enveloped Firestar as he drifted for a few moments but thus time he seemed to be gaining speed. Now was the time to strike back! Now was the time to show them all what he was made of! Firestar knew that he had the hardest battle ahead of him and despite everything, he swore would run to meet it head on regardless of the damage to his body.
Slowly Firestar opened his eyes and began to stand.

Duel of Fates

Groaning, Firestar shook the weariness from his body. The battlefield around him was eerily still, only the still bodies of the fallen giving any testament to the swirling melee which had taken place only moments before.
Yowls exploding of in the distance reached Firestar's ear and instantly adrenaline surged through his veins as he recognised Greystripe's voice. Although too far away for him to make out any words, Firestar's heart sank as he realised that the desparation in his friend's voice told him that the clans were struggling to hold back the surging tide of BloodClan warriors. Closing his eyes, Firestar pictured his clanmates crowded around the nursery while Scourge and his minions pressed forth with madness and fury.
" No," he growled resolutely, "I won't let that happen."
Bunching his muscles, Firestar sprang into the undergrowth, expertly weaving his way through the dense foliage, drawing ever closer to distant sounds of battle. Pain flared up in his wounds with every step but Firestar pushed it to the back of his mind. Passing out from his wounds was not a luxury he could afford at the moment. A scent was now drifting into his nostrils, several in fact. The first was that of moorland grass and heather which mixed nicely with the second, that of various aromatic herbs. But the final scent was the one which comforted him the most. The warm, welcoming milk scent of young kits.
"Dada, " mewed Finchkit as she dangled from Cinderpelt's jaws.
Rushing over and nuzzling his daughter's, Firestar turned to Onewhisker.
"What's going on?"
Onewhisker's voice was muffled through Leafkit and Squirrelkit's fur but was understandable all the same.
"We're going to WindClan camp. It's too dangerous back there for the kits and Cinderpelt."
Firestar nodded then noticed with a start that someone was missing.
"Where's Spottedleaf?"
Cinderpelt glanced at Onewhisker before turning to Firestar. " Scourge chased us here. Ravenpaw and Spottedleaf went off to hold

him off."
"And you let them?!" Firestar exclaimed incredulously, "Scourge is too dangerous!"
Cinderpelt shook her head sadly, "There was no stopping them although we tried."
Firestar winced at the thought of Spottedleaf facing off the tyranical warrior alone. "Where are they?"
Cinderpelt gestured behind them.
" Good," Firestar nodded, "Continue to WindClan and what ever happens, do not look back."
Dipping their heads, Cinderpelt and Onewhisker began to pad off.
"Wait, where are you going dad," mewed Leafkit.
Padding over, Firestar pressed his nuzzle to the tiny kit's cheek. " To get your mother back."
Taking off, Firestar left the five cats and headed deeper into the trees. Ringing in his ears, the din of battle grew louder with each yard covered. Out of the corner of his eyes, Firestar could now see flashes of fur as those clan cats who had been separated during the initial route began to turn and fight their way back through the rogues.
Turning a corner, Firestar skidded to a stop, a bone chilling sight before him. Three cats were in a clearing. Ravenpaw lay battered and barely breath in on the far side while Scourge stood over a crumpled form in front of him. Rage welled up inside Firestar as he recognised Spottedleaf's dappled fur as the she cat struggled to move under the iron grip of Scourge. Raising a claw, Scourge prepared to finish Spottedleaf off.
"Scourge stop," Firestar meowed in a voice that barely concealed his rage.
For a moment the tom stopped in his action and Firestar could almost sense his surprise as though it were his own. Slowly the dark tom turned to face his fiery furred counterpart.
"Impossible. "
Instantly Barley's words entered Firestar's mind. Scourge didn't follow the warrior code, it was his greatest strength but only his greatest weakness. Only now did it finally make sense. Without StarClan, Scourge was free to do as he saw fit but without StarClan's recognition, he wasn't a true leader.
Scourge only had one life.
"I am a true leader sent from StarClan and gifted with nine lives,"

Firestar growled taking a step forward, "And this fight is between you and me."
Scourge's eyes flickered briefly with uncertainty and for a moment, Firestar thought that the tom would back down. But whatever doubt there had been was instantly replaced by a burning, icy hatred and a grim determination.
"Fine" snarled Scourge, "If I have to face you again, so be it. I'll finish you like I finished that fox heart Tigerstar and then no one will stand in my way!"
Grimacing, Firestar knew that the tom meant every word. Socurge may have possessed only one life but he was still more than a match for any warrior the forest clan could throw at him and worst of all posessed the ability to cut down a leader like wheat before the scythe. There would be no third chance for Firestar. Whoever won this duel would be free to decide the fate of the clans.
Time seemed to slow to an arduous crawl as the two toms circled each other, studying their opponent's physique and pace. Fire burned in their souls as they paused, facing each other one last time, the very air still and all other sounds of war deaf to them. Then they leapt.
Claws flashed as Scourge lashed out at Firestar's head, the ginger warrior only dodging the deadly shards by a hair length. Whirling back around, Firestar kicked ot with his front paws only to glance Scourge's shoulder.
Scourge growled as he backed away briefly, crouching low with his teeth bared into a sinister snarl. Claws dug into the earth, Firestar braced him self for the dark tom's pounce. As Scourge launched himself across the clearing, Firestar went limp, allowing himself to be knocked under his opponent. Barely did Scourge have a chance to realise his mistake before Firestar kicked up and knocked him off.
Leaping back to his feet, the ginger tom sprinted towards Scourge, intent on finishing him before he could recover. But Scourge was already up and ready for the charge.
Tooth and claw bared, the two cats, began their enchanting dance of death. Firestar's warrior training and resolve was pitted against Scourge's savage instincts and uncanny speed. A spirit of fire against an icy cold hatred. Flashing images of cats guiding his paws, drive Firestar forward as he saw the fallen warriors of StarClan appeared beside him, speaking with one voice in his mind.

"You must win Firestar, you're our only hope," They cried in what can only be described as the purest terror.
And yet despite his efforts and the aid of StarClan, Scourge was still standing defiant and Firestar knew that he could not continue the fight forever. Sensing that the ThunderClan leader was beginning to tire, Scourge contorted his face into a sadistic grin and pressed the attack. Forced backwards, Firestar ducked and dodged the flurry of blows sent his way but it was ultimately futile. Taking a hefty blow to the head, Firestar gasped as Scourge then kicked him in the flank, winding the tom as he toppled to the ground. Smirking, Scourge bent down to face Firestar as the tom lay helpless before him.
"Don't despair Firestar," he sneered, "The result would have been the same even if you hadn't been brought back to life by mystical cats or whatever you call them. Now why don't you make your peace before I end your miserable existence."
Fighting to get air into his lungs, Firestar strained to stand up but it was no use. Tracing a single claw along his belly, Scourge prepared to finish him in the same way as Tigerstar. An agonisingly horrible death was only seconds away even as Firestar fought to stand back up.
Screeching in agony, Scourge suddenly leapt back as he felt Spottedleaf's jaws clamp around his tail. While the ebony rogue recovered, the dappled medicine cat padded over to her mate and giving him a lick on the ear, causing Firestar to raise his head.
" We're not out of this yet my love," she smiled weakly as she helped Firestar shakily to his feet.
" You little pest!" Roared Scourge smashing into Spottedleaf, kicking Firestar back. Hissing Spottedleaf swatted at Scourge's muzzle drawing blood as she carved a deep fissure into his nose. But Scourge was not to be stopped, kicking Spottedleaf brutally to the ground. Fluttering lifelessly to the ground, the flower that Spottedleaf wore behind her ear lay still. Looking at it for a brief moment, Scourge crushed it underfoot before regarding Spottedleaf.
" Even for a clan cat, you're pathetic," he growled.
No sooner than had he said this however than had Firestar launched himself at Scourge, barrelling into him.
"How dare you?" He roared, "That's my mate!!"
Spitting, Firestar attacked Scourge, a fire of anger burning within his heart as he sliced through Scourge's ear. With a hiss Scourge

retaliated, tearing up and raking his claws down Firestar's flanks before letting loose with another blow.
Drawing back, Firestar's eyes flashed as he suddenly saw something. A flaw in Scourge's technique. It was brief but with Scourge refusing to tire, it was his only hope.
Blood trickling down the side of his face, Firestar slowed his attacks as though tiring. Sensing his opportunity, Scourge smirked and slashed his paw forth, inadvertently exposing a part of his throat not protected by his fang studded collar. This was all Firestar needed. Shifting his weight suddenly, Firestar narrowly avoided the blow and before Scourge could recover, swung his claws across Scourge's throat.
Gurgling, Scourge fell as the claws dug deep into his throat. Looking back up at Firestar, Scourge's expression turned from anger turned into one of melancholy glee.
"You'll never forget me..." he hissed. Scourge's flank rose and fell one last time then was still.
Crashing through the bush, three cats bearing BloodClan collars snarled at Firestar before halting at the sight of Scourge's mangled body.
"Scourge is dead!" They wailed before taking one fearful look at Firestar. Before the ginger tom could make a singa movement, the trio bolted back towards ThunderClan camp, screaming the fate of Scourge.
Turning back to Scourge, Firestar gasped as he saw the faint black outline of a cat stood over the rogues body. The spirit looked at Firestar with the same icy blue eyes that it had in life but they seemed to be filled with more than just hate. There was pain, loss and fear also in Scourge's eyes now and as the ghostly apparition faded away, Firestar knew that Scourge's words were true. Never word he forget the dark tom.
Casting a look across the clearing, Firestar's eyes widened as he saw Spottedleaf lying still beneath a tree. No longer with adrenaline flowing through his body, Firestar began to feel the full extent of his grievous injuries as he stumbled over to his love. Falling at the last moment, Firestar crawled weakly towards Spottedleaf.
"We did it," he smiled nudging her gently.
"We sure ...did, " Spottedleaf whispers through barely open eyes, "I love you. ..my love." She then fell silent, her eyes closing.
"Spottedleaf...don't leave me.." whimpered Firestar nuzzling his

mate weakly as unconsciousness began to claim him and before long the two cats lay still as the sun set over the forest.

Aftermath

Some say that right before you die, your life flashes before your eyes, a final countdown of all your memories even the ones you had pushed to the very back if your mind, hoping that your inner demons would never resurface. Whether or not that was true for everyone, Firestar was experiencing it right now. All the love. All the pain. Everything was amplified ten fold as Firestar's memories and emotions surged raced by him in a blur of colour.
The warm milk scent of a mother. A ball of grey fur barrelling into him. Scenting his first prey. A large tabby standing over a bloodied she cat. Fleeting glances of a beautiful tortoiseshell. The rustle of kits in straw and finally two ice blue eyes. Then it all went black. Was this the end?
"Damn it Firestar don't die in me!"
Slithering down his throat suddenly, a foul mould like taste jolted Firestar awake as he began to cough up the disgusting poultice. Blinking his eyes open, Firestar panted as he saw Cinderpelt move to hold him down.
"Stay still," she said calmly but firmly, "Your mustn't remove your bandages."
Groaning, Firestar only now saw thany cobwebs hugging his wounds. Many of them were faintly red from where they had been trying to staunch the flow of blood.
"How long was I out?" Firestar mewed weakly as his eyes adjusted to the dim light of the medicine den. Various herbal scents washed over him in a sweeping tide of sweet smells.
"All night," Cinderpelt yawned. Firestar felt a pang of sympathy for her, Cinderpelt must have been working throughout the night to ensure the clan didn't essentially bleed out. Suddenly something hit Firestar harder than Tigerstar or Scourge ever could.
"Where's Spottedleaf?" He asked, "Is she safe? Is she alright?"
Cinderpelt went quiet for a moment and didn't answer and Firestar's heart sank like a rock in a swirling torrent.
"Perhaps you should ask her yourself." Cinderpelt smiled, stepping aside to reveal Spottedleaf's dappled for sat behind her. Smiling gently Spottedleaf limped over, her leg bandaged, and gave Firestar

a loving lick behind the ears.
"She has hardly left your side all night," Cinderpelt mewed, "Only to then to feed the kits."
"Really?" Firestar nuzzled his mate.
Spottedleaf nodded before adding almost impishly. "Speaking of which, kits!"
Instantly three little heads peered around the corner of the medicine den and charged Firestar. The kit's father chuckled and nuzzled them in turn until Cinderpelt began to shoo them away.
" Sorry but Firestar can't play now, he needs to rest. Now go out and play. " she said in her normal calm but firm way. While Squirrelkit and Finchkit bounded away, their sister stayed behind and gazed around the medicine den in purest wonder.
Spottedleaf chuckled slightly. "Looks like you're going to have an apprentice soon Cinderpelt."
The grey she cat smiled and nodded "It appears so." She then turned to Firestar, "You should go and see Greystripe, I know he'd appreciate it to know you are well."
"I'd appreciate seeing him also, " replied Firestar standing shakily only to be caught by Spottedleaf.
"Easy," she warned as thy swayed slightly, "Scourge did a lot of damage. Frankly we are surprised you regained consciousness when you did."
Firestar nodded and together they began to slowly out of the close confines of the den. Blinking their eyes as they adjusted to the considerably brighter light outside, the couple looked around them where the remnants of the clan went about their business repairing the camp. Dustpelt weaved new brambles into the nursery alongside Fernpaw while Cloudtail and Brightheart returned from a hunting expedition. Glancing around, Firestar spotted Greystripe sat discussing matters with Tallstar. Upon hearing their approach, the two toms looked up and smiled warmly.
"I didn't expect to see you up this early," Greystripe meowed jokingly.
"I'll worry about my wounds when the clan's have healed," Firestar replied determinedly.
"A noble sentiment," Tallstar nodded approvingly, "All the same don't strain too hard, your clan will need a strong leader in the aftermath of the battle. "
"Much appreciated advice" Firestar nodded.

"Where are Leopardstar and Blackstar?" Spottedleaf added glancing around, "Have they left for their clans already?"
Tallstar nodded. "Now that the danger is over, the clans must now return to their territories and rebuild. As much as I would like to stay and aid you, I must return to my clan and help them rebuild."
"Understood, thank you for helping," Firestar smiled as Tallstar politely nodded and turned to leave with Onewhisker and the other few WindClan cats who had stayed to help rebuild the ThunderClan camp.
Turning back to his friend, Firestar followed Greystripe through the camp.
" How bad is it?"
Greystripe managed a weak smile. "We'll make it. Sandstorm has been working all day to replenish the freshkill pile."
As they padded by Sandstorm passed them with two mice on her way to the pile. She nodded politely and hurried along to carry out her task.
Reaching the edge of the thicket, the trio of cats looked across the abandoned battlefield, now as still as a sheltered port after a storm. There, lying before them, was the unmoving body of Scourge. No longer were his eyes burning with icy hatred. No more were his claws unsheathed in anger. Quietly lying there, Scourge lay there as calm and harmless as a kit nestled within his mother's belly.
"We should move these bodies as far away from camp as possibly," snorted Greystripe, "I don't want Scourge anywhere near me, even in death."
Firestar looked at Scourge's broken body and felt something within him. What could have driven the tom to be willing kill anyone to claim the clans? Was it possible that he was born bad or had something else happened to turn him evil? Hadn't Scourge claimed to have known Tigerstar before he killed him, a kill he had seemed to relish as though he had awaited it for the moment for moons. Whatever the reason, the knowledge had died along with the dark warrior, lost to the all consuming winds of time.
"No. We bury them here." Firestar declared.
"Really?" Greystripe and Spottedleaf exclaimed in unison.
" Yes, " Firestar nodded, "Scourge and his clan died as a result of Tigerstar's bid for power just as much as their own actions. We may not have known of their existence of not for that traitor. So many lives have been lost and we should not discrimate between the

graves of clan or rogue. All were warriors merely fighting for their way of life."
A silence passed over them for a second before Greystripe nodded quietly.
"As you wish my friend," he smiled padding away to make the arrangements, leaving Firestar and Spottedleaf alone.
For a while they sat leaning lovingly against each other, their scents wrapping around the lovers.Turning, they locked longingly into each other's eyes before slowly leaning in and kissing each other.
"So my love, what do you see in our future?" Spottedleaf blushed as they pulled away. Firestar nuzzled her head gently.
"The clan is recovering and will soon return to its former glory."
"With our new leader, we can't go far wrong." Spottedleaf purred pressing against his soft fur.
"And with medicine cats like ours," Firestar replied smiling warmly, "We are in skilled and loving paws."
Blushing Spottedleaf continued to press against his fur and together they watched the sun descend from the evening sky, marking the end of an era and the dawn of another.

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Author's note: Thank you all for reading my story and for your patience in waiting. I am amazed and grateful for all the support I have received and I hope you have enjoyed it half as much as I enjoyed writing it. I may write another Fire x Spotted story based on their first meeting or perhaps a sequel to this or another couple such as Grey x Silver or Cloud x Bright.
Please tell me what you think and thanks again for reading!
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